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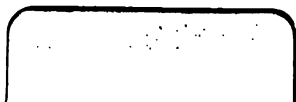
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CECY'S RECOLLECTIONS





CECY'S RECOLLECTIONS

A Story of Obscure Lives

By MARY BRAMSTON



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I.

HIGHTHORPE VICARAGE.

'I remember, I remember
The house where I was born ;
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn :
He never came a wink too soon,
Nor brought too long a day.'—HOOD.

MY story is of so extremely commonplace and every-day a character that I have had many doubts as to whether it is worth either writing or reading. Certainly it would be as well for those who love 'sensations' — whether in the way of hair-breadth escapes or midnight murders—to lay it down at once : for it has none of these to offer them. It is simply the story of a girl's life : and I, Cecilia Hope, the narrator, have not, and never had, any pretensions to heroineship.

But though the sphere of my experiences is but narrow, I could not help fancying that, such as they are, they might be worth narrating. They have, it is true, little relation to that great stirring world without, which fills the air with clash and clang, the echoes of which reach even us women in our quiet household nests. As far as one can see, it would not have made much difference to mankind at large if the events I am going to relate had never happened: and yet I hardly know; for can the meanest human life pass away from mortal view without leaving for good or evil some indelible trace? faint and confused, perhaps, to us, but clear and plain to that all-seeing Eye which watches us.

Therefore I here begin my story.

I was born at a little, quiet, out-of-the-way village on the crest of a low range of hills which relieves the monotonous flatness of one of the eastern counties of England. The one street of Highthorpe climbs up the hill-side, and is composed of lath and plaster cottages roofed with tiles which time has deepened into rich mellow red-brown, and fronted by little square gardens with wooden palings. Here and

there, for the most part honoured by a piece of green lawn and a yew-tree clipt into some fantastic shape, you might see a somewhat larger house, but none which had any pretensions to anything beyond the farm-house style: we had no staring four-walled 'villas,' all wall and no roof, with plate-glass windows and unsheltered garden, at Highbury. All the farm-houses and cottages, with the exception of those actually in the village street, seemed to shrink from notice and to nestle away under the protection of the great sheltering trees, which had not yet been cut down for agricultural economy: for the woods loved our little village, and had crept up the southern side of the hill until they seemed to encircle it with their spreading arms. Ah, those woods: what regions of wonder and mystery they were to us in our childhood! They were all the more wonderful and mysterious from the fact of any wanderings in them being steadfastly discouraged by our old nurse, who had found such for the most part to result in torn pinafores and wet boots. But we *knew* that they were blue with bluebells in May, and green with soft velvet moss all the year round: and we had heard

whispers of lily of the valley roots, of all things most charming to children : nor was the element of horror wanting to add piquancy to our wanderings, for the woods were said to be infested with snakes. However, I must confess that when I grew older and the woods were no longer forbidden me, I found them somewhat less of a paradise : though not on account of the snakes, since I never saw anything like one but once, and that was a slowworm.

The church and vicarage stood on the top of the hill, sheltered from the north and east by a thick grove of firs, which served as beacon to the countryside for miles round. The church was said to have some good points of architecture about it ; but in my time they were effectually disguised under whitewash and high pews. This is all changed now : they have repewed the church, and neat varnished open seats, with crockets, and finials, and I cannot say what besides, have taken the place of the old square pews, in the graining of which I used to discover imaginary pictures of David and Goliath, Moses in the bulrushes, and all varieties of grotesque birds and beasts : and the old square clear window-panes, which showed

the blue sky and white clouds through, have been exchanged for orthodox thick diamond ones—but though my taste, I suppose, acquiesces in the arrangement, my heart does not. The churchyard, however, is still unaltered: it is bordered all round by clipped lime-trees, and when the sun is turning towards the west on a summer afternoon, it pours through the great cool leaves, making them look like detached pieces of luminous green. Then, what a glorious sight it is that meets one's eye! Between the trunks of the trees you look down and see before you miles on miles of level country—woods, fields, and farmsteads—summer corn-fields ripening and reddening for the harvest—green pastures by the side of little wandering brooks, which creep almost unseen under their broad screen of great rushes and flag-leaves, only here and there betraying their existence by a sudden gleam of shining water. You may look and look out and away, until the boundaries of field and hedge grow indistinct, and all merge into one luminous haze of sunlight; but on the other side of the churchyard the view is different. It is almost equally extensive, but it is an extent of bare marsh intersected by a great

river : there is no golden glow of sunlight there, only blue mist : and beyond all a faint gray line which can be oftener imagined than seen—the sea itself!

This was the view which we could see from our nursery windows, and which my brother George and I were never weary of looking at—at least when the weather was clear. For it was most intense delight when by chance we saw a white sail speck that blue line ; and we felt quite exalted in our own estimation when we thought that we were looking upon the real great sea which we read about in history, over which William the Conqueror had crossed, and on which the great Armada battle had been fought out. That faint gray line was a sort of connecting link between our quiet uneventful home-life and the world's great Past.

The vicarage was old-fashioned in appearance, and partook of the farm-house character which I have mentioned as common to all the houses at Highthorpe ; and the garden was surrounded by a high brick wall, which kept out the keen easterly blasts, and made it so warm and sheltered that our fruit and flowers were always at least a week in advance of

other people's. Good old-fashioned flowers—pinks, stocks, cabbage-roses, and tall white lilies, grew more abundantly than I have ever seen them elsewhere; and what did we children care for anything better? My dear old garden! there is nothing like it at Highbury now. I paid a visit there long after I had left it, and asked leave to walk round the vicarage grounds; but I should not have known the old place again. The wall had been pulled down, and shrubs and other trees artfully planted, to make the garden look larger than it was; but the poor things were so cut and stunted by the east wind, that this intention was quite frustrated; and half the apple-trees on the grass plat had been cut down, to make a good croquet lawn, and two little girls in frizzed hair, short frocks, and wide crinolines were knocking the balls and mallets about in George's and my old playground.

We were free to pick any of the flowers in the garden except from one border, just under the parlour window, where were planted a few carefully-watched and tended geraniums and calceolarias. These we were not allowed to touch; because, as Dawson, our old nurse, told us, 'they were your poor dear mamma's.'

For we were motherless children, and our mother had died at my birth.

My father was married twice. Once to the daughter of a neighbouring clergyman, a homely, kind-hearted, unintellectual woman, some years older than himself, who died after ten years of married life, leaving him one little boy—my eldest brother, James. The next time it was to quite a young girl, scarcely twenty at the time of her marriage; and she was not spared to him so long; for before four years had passed from the time that the bells rang out for her marriage they were tolling for her burial; and George, the baby-boy of two, and I, the little helpless infant, were motherless.

I cannot remember from personal experience what my father was like in his prime of manhood; for the great loss which left me motherless crushed and bowed him so, that he was never like the same man afterwards. But I have heard, and gathered from those who did know, that he was very eager in everything he undertook, and inclined to be hasty and impatient. The stirring times of five-and-thirty years ago roused his whole spirit: he was intolerant of

anything like party-spirit or narrowness of view, and not choosing to side with any party, was attacked by both, and stood almost alone. He did not mind the loss of many friends or the world's slanders, so long as his sweet young wife was by his side to help him to withstand them : but her loss left him a broken-spirited man ; his health began to fail, and the world heard little more of him. There are few, out of his immediate neighbourhood, who now remember the name of John Hope.

But, in my recollection, the eager impatient spirit had long been trained and disciplined by sorrow and pain ; and my father had become a confirmed invalid without hope of recovery. So much so, that small as our parish was, he was obliged to keep a curate : and as our means were at all times limited, this expense straitened them considerably. I have heard the doctor who attended my father say, that had he been a rich man living at ease, and able to take a year's thorough rest and change, his illness, at one stage, might have been arrested. But he could not afford to do so ; and by the time I was seven years old he was like an old man in feebleness, though in

reality not past the middle of life. His features were not in themselves beautiful ; they were large and strong, and I have heard it said that in early life they were harsh ; but I never can remember any harshness in them ; only an expression of patient, hard-learned self-restraint. I never remember hearing him speak unkindly of any man. ‘I hope he will learn better some day,’ was his constant reply if told of any glaring instance of uncharitableness or party-spirit, such as would once have brought out vehement anger and denunciation from him : and reports of wrong-doing in the village, or our childish faults, seemed to grieve him so much that there was no room left for indignation. I think that George and myself, even when very little children, would have curbed the most unbridled passion, and restrained the most inviting retort, sooner than bring a shadow over that kind, patient face.

My two brothers were a great contrast to one another. James was quick, fussy, and restless ; short and slight, with a sandy complexion and light hair and eyes ; altogether, the impression which he gave was that of a well-meaning, weak character, with-

out any individuality, or power of original thought. George, on the contrary, was tall and large-limbed; broader and stouter than any boy of his age in the village; quiet and fond of ease, but when once roused to action, never desisting until he had obtained his point. I generally made George follow my lead, being the youngest and a general pet; but now and then I found that I could not stir him an inch by any amount of entreaties and protestations, and that his will was the strongest of the two. We were very fond of one another: his easy temper bore with unruffled good-humour my eager petulance, and spoilt-baby airs; and I loved him well enough never to attempt to thwart him in anything that I saw he had really set his mind upon. In personal appearance we were very unlike; he was a fine-looking boy, ruddy and fair-haired, with merry blue eyes; and I was a tiny brown-skinned girl, very slight and small, with a diminutive face and features, widely-opened brown eyes, and nut-brown hair cropped closely above my ears. He was more like our father, and I like our mother, though without any of the beauty attributed to her in the little miniature in my father's room.

Our one servant—cook, nurse, and housekeeper in one—was an old woman named Dawson; which name we children shortened into ‘Daw.’ Her morning dress was always blue print: her afternoon, black silk, with a snow-white clear-starched muslin kerchief pinned over her shoulders. She was one of those whose bark is worse than their bite: for while the village in general stood in great dread of Mrs Dawson, we never found in her anything but kindness. She persisted in doing all the work herself, with only an occasional charwoman to help her, though she might have had some one under her: but she had an undisguised contempt for the whole modern race of girls, who, she said, were ‘poor useless things, with their ribbons and their light cotton gowns and their wove stockings, they can’t boil you a potato fit to eat, nor wash up a dozen plates without breaking one. Catch me with a girl to help me, Miss Cecy!’

Our gardener was a man of the name of King, with a tidy wife and a nice little daughter, in whose behalf Dawson sometimes relaxed her rule against girls. Carry King was allowed to come and play

with us: she was a plump, rosy, good-natured country girl, about two years older than George, and I looked up to her with the greatest respect and esteem: for she had made her father a shirt while I was learning to hem a pocket-handkerchief, and was trusted to light the fire and boil the potatoes for dinner! Anyhow, no one could deny that she possessed the charm of unfailing good-humour: and it was truly a friend in need that she proved herself in after years.

But among all my early friends, I have not mentioned my far-away cousin, Charles Hope. He was a schoolboy without any more agreeable home than the house of a bachelor London uncle: and it was somehow a settled thing that he came to spend his summer holidays with us. In age he was just between George and James: but he was very unlike James in his treatment of us little ones. James used to snub us on every possible occasion; not out of unkindness, but by way of supporting his own dignity as elder brother: while Charley was the most good-natured fellow in the world, and used to bring us playthings and story-books, and take us out for long

rambles, carrying me whenever my small legs got tired. What a fearful difference of age there was between us at eight and fifteen !

Ours was a very happy childhood, but very quiet. One of the first things I remember is being taken on my father's knee and told to sing to him. I could sing somehow before I could speak, and I could always manage to sing anything I had once heard ; and he used to call me his little Saint Cecilia. I remember once his leaning back in his chair, and murmuring to himself Handel's chorus to 'Alexander's Feast—'

' He raised a mortal to the skies,
She drew an angel down.'

Then he said, as if to himself, 'No, and I would not if I could : even your voice, my little Cecy, would not bring her down to earth. She is hearing sweeter music now.' And in a deep low voice, which sounded to me like the organ in church when the Bourdon stop was out, he murmured that verse of Bishop Heber's hymn for Trinity Sunday,

' All thy saints adore thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea ;'

and I felt that his mind was living in the midst of those unseen realities which take us so long to learn to realize, and that 'where his treasure was, there was his heart also.'

We never connected any sad associations with our lost mother. Our father freely spoke of her to us : it seemed as if he would have thought it a slight to her memory if she were not constantly held before our childish minds. George and I used to wonder why Dawson should always speak of her as 'your poor dear mamma,' when she was so happy up in the beautiful blue sky—the child's visible heaven ; and could hear prettier music than even the church organ, without the necessity of sitting still and standing quiet—that terrible penance which going to church entailed upon us.

The church music was an intense delight to me. I wish I could now call up the pleasure I felt when the organist struck up any of my favourite tunes—Rousseau's Dream, China, or Cambridge New,—all long since exploded from modern psalmody. Then, on a christening Sunday, we used to speculate with great anxiety on the names and behaviour of the babies :

since we thought ourselves justified in looking at one another and laughing when the babies squalled, and that made a little variety; and a little more was accorded us by the pew-opener, an old man with a long snuff-coloured coat and a cane, exactly like Noah in the Noah's ark, who walked about the church to administer chastisement to offenders. We were always threatened with a rap of his cane if we were naughty, and sometimes, when our consciences were uneasy, we used to tremble with fright as he approached our pew: but he always gave us a benignant smile—his hand went into his pocket, and drew out a couple of peppermint lozenges, which were laid upon the top of the pew for us, and very soon disappeared.

Our early education was conducted in a peculiar way. When George was seven, and I five and a half, we were sent every day to the village school to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic, and we went there for four years, not playing with the village children, but learning with them. Our only neighbour within visiting distance, Mrs Baron, the wife of the clergyman of the next parish, was extremely

shocked at this system of education, and on every possible occasion inveighed against it to my father, without much success. I believe she thought she was doing me an immense service by inviting me now and then to spend the day with her two little girls, Alice and Edith—fair, inane, characterless children, who never made a remark or thought a thought which had not been suggested by some one else. They were objects of admiration to me, however, for they had both long light ringlets and long frilled drawers, as was the fashion in those days, while I was always dressed in most homely style ('just like a poor person's child,' they used to say), in brown holland pinafore and dark knitted stockings. I never thought about my appearance except at the Barons', where my attention was continually called to it by such comments as these:—'Why do you wear strapped shoes? *we* wear sandals.' 'Why do you have your hair cut so short? don't you think our curls are much prettier?' 'How thin you are! I would wear long sleeves if I were you: short sleeves are like a baby. Mamma says girls ought to have nice fat arms: look at mine!' Mrs Baron made my life miserable by

innumerable small lectures upon manners and propriety, and it was an unspeakable relief to be again in our happy garden, enjoying a particularly unrestrained game of romps with George.

II.

THE FIRST TROUBLE.

' When all the world is young, lad,
 And all the trees are green,
 And every goose a swan, lad,
 And every lass a queen :
 Then hey for boot and horse, lad,
 And round the world away :
 Young blood will have his course, lad,
 And every dog his day.'—KINGSLEY.

WHEN I was just ten years old my first real trouble came upon me—George went to school. For nights before the dreaded day arrived I sobbed myself to sleep ; it was the first time that I had ever cried for anything that was inevitable : and I remember that, mingled with my real grief, there was an element of dignity in having something really to cry for. My cousin Charley, who was very compassionate towards me, tried to comfort me : but I rejected his proffered consolation with wrath, which I was sorry for when I had seen him and George

drive away in a fly to the Estford station, one dark, misty summer morning. I retired to my own room to indulge my grief—bolted my door, lest Dawson should come in and find me crying; and sat down on the window-seat to review my position, pity myself, and think that no one ever was so unhappy before.

I was not left long to enjoy my solitude. The handle of the door was turned: and finding it locked, Dawson called out, ‘Miss Cecy, Miss Cecy, whatever are you about there? Make haste and come down: master wants you this minute.’ So I hastily washed my face, that it might not betray my late occupation; for I hated nothing so much as to be seen crying; and then ran down-stairs to the study, where my father was sitting by the open window, through which came a delicious scent of summer flowers. The study was a pleasant room, though the furniture was very old and worn, and the walls were lined with book-cases—not handsome ones, covered with brass wire, through which you may see an inviting multitude of leather backs and gold letters—but old dusty folios, and books in that very

ugly style of covering which used to be called 'boards,' and which preceded the many-coloured cloth bindings of the present day. Over the mantel-piece was a large print of Leonardo's 'Last Supper,' and under it that exquisite little miniature of my mother of which I have spoken before—a sweet child-like face with waving brown hair, and large, deep, thoughtful brown eyes. In colouring I was supposed to be like her, but I never came near her for beauty of feature.

Into this room it was that I entered. My father held out his hand to me. 'Come here, little Cecy,' he said: and I came and stood beside him, laying my head on his shoulder without speaking. The long heave which follows violent childish sobs betrayed me against my will: he put his arm round me.

'So you have been crying, little one,' he said: 'no wonder, it is your first trouble. Well, we must try to meet it bravely, my dear. We can't have everything at once: the little birds must fly out of the nest before they learn to sing, you know.'

'But it would be much nicer if they could stop in

the nest, father, and learn to sing at the same time. I can't see why they shouldn't.'

He smiled, and said, 'But how about learning to provide for themselves, Cecy, and keeping the slugs and caterpillars in order? Do you think they could learn to do that in the nest?'

'No,' I answered in rather a melancholy tone: 'I did not suppose they could.'

'Then, little one, don't you see, you must try to reconcile yourself to the thought of our George leaving our little nest here to learn to be a useful man one day, and do the work in the world that God will set him to do? You would sooner see him grow up good and useful, than have him always at your side and see him idle and fit for nothing when he is a man.'

'But I wish we could always go on just as we have been, and never get older,' I said, beginning to cry afresh. 'Things go on, and won't stop, though you want them to ever so much—and I think it isn't nice at all.'

My father smiled for one moment at my childish way of expressing myself: then his face grew grave, and he took me up on his knee. Ten years old

though I was, I was too light to be any burden then, even to him.

‘My darling,’ he said, pressing me closely to him, ‘I have felt as you do very often. But God has put us into a world where we can’t stop still—we must go on and on till we come to the end : and all these little changes, and greater ones too—and all the happy times we leave behind as we go on, are to make us remember that we have not our home here, but only stop here for a while. And our home, you know, Cecy, is far away. And if we make it our first business to enjoy ourselves, and think of our own happiness, we shall be sure to be unhappy when changes come : but if we try to think of what God wants us to do, and to do His will,—then we shall be able to bear them, and learn by them to be patient and brave.’ He went on thinking, with that absent look in his eyes which always awed me ; and I sat still on his knee without speaking. At last his thoughts returned to the present.

‘Well, Cecy, so you see, now you have lost George, I must try and be your companion instead of him. Do you know I am going to make a change

in your education too? I am not going to send you to school any longer ; you will do most of your lessons with me instead ; and Mr Jones, the organist, will come once a week to teach you music, and twice a week you are to go over to Mrs Baron's, to learn French with Alice and Edith.'

This was the only blank spot in that otherwise delightful programme : but I have no doubt it did me good in the end to be forced now and then into some other society than that of my home. Alice and Edith' Baron and their mother looked upon me as an incorrigible dunce ; for I was always slow at learning by heart, and never had to do it at home ; whereas that was the only plan of education at Estford Rectory. However, at fourteen I was better acquainted than many older girls with many standard books : Shakespeare, Milton, and Gray were my favourite poets, for my father was too old-fashioned in his taste to admire any modern poetry except the 'Christian Year.' On the whole, I was very happy, with the exception of the week after George returned to school, which usually made me rather disconsolate.

One Christmas-time, when I was between thirteen

and fourteen, had been looked for with especial eagerness; for not only George was expected, as usual, but Charley also; and Charley had been tutorizing in France by way of doing something for a year or two while he made up his mind upon his future course. He would have preferred to go to Oxford and become a clergyman, but his uncle, on whom he depended for subsistence, was a strong Dissenter, and would not hear of this; so that since he had left school he had been waiting, half in the hope that his uncle might relent before settling upon his future course. We had not seen him for two years; and two years, at that time of life, change a boy into a man. Charley arrived in course of time, with George; the latter a tall, broad, long-limbed boy, with the merry eyes and bright smile he had kept since his childhood; altogether, a brother to be proud of, even in the awkward age of hobbetyboyhood:—the former not as tall, broad, or handsome, but with an active well-knit frame, kindly bright eyes, and a pleasant face and voice, both of which you instinctively felt that you could trust. At least, he had not turned into a Frenchman in the course of his residence abroad.

There was plenty to hear and ask on both sides ; and at half-past nine, when prayers were over, and my father went to bed, we three adjourned to the kitchen, our favourite resort on winter evenings. We were too unsophisticated even to dream of such things as fires in our bedrooms ; but we always used to warm ourselves and chat by the kitchen fire before going to bed. Our kitchen was a most delightful place : it was low, with a bricked and sanded floor, and great smoke-blackened rafters for the ceiling : while an enormous fire-place, with a chimney-seat at each corner, gave warmth and light to the room. When George was not at home, I used to coax Dawson to stop and tell me stories, of which she had a great store : ghost-stories which made one creep—others of a less terrible, but as mythical a nature, such as how a boy she knew had seen ‘little Pharisees’ dancing in the horsebin, or how the ‘seven whistlers’ had been heard to sing on the roof when her grandmother lay dying. But she considerably left us the kitchen to ourselves to-night, and we enjoyed it to the utmost.

Charley first had a great many questions to ask ;

and then it was my turn. 'Now, Charley, do tell me what you are going to do. Has that old uncle of yours relented?'

'No, nor likely to. In fact, he has been quarrelling with me.'

'Not you with him, of course,' said George.

'No, on my honour. I did all I could not to quarrel with him; I would have given in to everything but what he said.'

'What did he want you to do, then?'

'Why, he offered to make me his heir, on condition—'

'Of marrying some old fright?' asked George.

'Of going to chapel with him every Sunday?' I suggested, in orthodox horror.

'No, neither,' said Charley with a laugh. 'I won't say but what it might have come to what Cecy suggests in time; but he wanted me to promise never to have any communication with my father's family, and to change my name to Davis.'

'But why?' I said innocently, while George burst into a storm of indignation. 'Your father's family consists of us and the Raymonds of Black-

moor, doesn't it? I am sure we never did Mr Davis any harm, and those old Miss Raymonds could not if they tried.'

'Well,' said Charley, 'I don't know that I quite understand it myself: but as far as I do, the fact seems to be this. He has got narrower and narrower in his views lately, and has been trying to instil them into me. Well, I don't agree with them'—'I should hope not,' from George—'and it is no use pretending that I do—least of all would I do it to get something by it. However, he is really fond of me in his way, and it seems that some one put it into his head that it was the effect of your father's influence that made me so obstinate; and just at the same time he heard this story about James that I told you—'

'What story?' I asked, for I was in ignorance of the proceedings of my eldest brother, who was in London studying for the bar, and was not coming home this Christmas.

'Never mind, we'll tell you afterwards,' said George. 'Go on, Charley.'

'That he had been spending more than he ought,' said Charley, 'and been rather wild altogether. My

uncle heard of this, and coupled with the other, it gave him a sort of disgust not very complimentary to my father's family : so at last he put it plainly before me—that I was to be his heir if I would drop your acquaintance, and change my name, as I said before : and that I was to have a clerkship in his house of business, and some day to rise to be partner.'

'And so you threw it all up, like a jolly brick?'

'Of course I did, coupled with that condition. I can't say I was sorry on the whole : I suppose if he had not made it I should have had to swallow it all, and I don't fancy a clerk's life in a counting-house, whatever amount of tin it might bring me in.'

'I don't think I should mind it,' said George. 'And now what on earth are you going to do? Farewell to all hopes of Oxford, I suppose.'

'Of course. I have the large sum of six hundred pounds of my own, so that is out of the question. Besides, though I think, as I always did, that it is one of the most splendid things a man can do to be a hardworking parson in a big town, I don't think I could stand a little country parish, like this, for

instance. One would get rusty and narrow in one's views—'

'I am sure papa is not rusty and narrow!' I exclaimed.

'I never in the least meant to say that he was. He would never become so, born in a desert island: I was only speaking for myself. So I am going to do the next best thing a man can, in my idea.'

'Get a commission and live on your pay?' suggested George.

'Go out as a missionary?' I asked.

'Marry a rich wife?'

'Or hang myself,' said Charley. 'None of these, my beloved cousins. My idea is—emigration.'

'But you might be a missionary and emigrate at the same time,' I said, somewhat disappointed.

'The first would involve the second, certainly,' he answered. 'But my idea, Cecy, is emigration without being a missionary. I am very sorry for you, you look so intensely disgusted: but so it is, alas!'

'But it is much grander to be a missionary,' I said: 'and you know, Charley, you said you would

like to be a clergyman. Do be a missionary; you could do so much good.'

'What a little donkey you are, Cecy!' was the flattering remark I received from George. 'Don't you suppose that people can do good by colonizing a country and making it fit to live in? It is so like a girl to go mad about missionaries and *dear blacks*!'

'No, Cecy,' said Charles, more gently, his manner a marked contrast to George's, 'I don't think you a donkey at all. I quite agree with you that it is a grand thing to be a missionary: but you know one ought not to undertake it unless one feels strongly gifted that way and inclined for the work, and I am sorry to say I don't. So I mean to try and do the best thing I am fit for: and that, I am inclined to think, is what I have told you. I shall consult your father before I make up my mind: but I have pretty well decided.'

'And where will you go to?'

'I don't know, I am sure. I should like Canada best, I think: but I fancy it is getting too civilized for my pocket. However, that is a matter for further consideration.'

When my father had been consulted, he fully agreed with Charles: and our evenings in the kitchen were principally taken up with discussing his future plans. I was just growing out of the child into the girl, and was flattered by being taken into consultation as if I were a woman: and Charley's considerate manner was the more strange and pleasant from its contrast to George's, who was rather fond of administering what, though both given and taken in good part, was very like snubbing, and made the recipient feel small. George had not yet quite got to the age when a sister is looked upon as an equal, and as I was his junior, he looked down upon me from the heights both of age and of sex.

Before the summer Charley had sailed for Canada, having heard of what seemed to promise a good opening for him. We all gave him parting gifts: my father presented him with the *Life of Arnold*; George, with an ivory egg with holes in it, which was to make tea without a tea-pot: Dawson made him an enormous woollen comforter; and I, a set of shirts. We walked to Estford station with him, unwilling to lose our last chance of seeing him: we saw

the white wreath of steam grow smaller and smaller in the distance, and another of our small circle had left us, to face and fight his way through the great world of which we knew so little. He managed to keep up his spirits pretty well till he left us : I happen to know, however, on good authority, that he broke down when he was alone in the corner of the railway carriage, having left for ever the only place he had looked on as his home. I used to listen to the wind wailing on windy nights, as it often did on the top of Highbury Hill, and tremble and wonder where Charley's ship was, and whether there was an awful storm out at sea. But at last, before so very long, we heard that Charley had safely reached New York, from whence he was to proceed to his destination : and then another letter came, describing his new abode, not in intensely enthusiastic terms, certainly, but cheerily and brightly enough. In time, we became accustomed to his absence, and began to look forward to the time when he might come back to pay us a visit : but that was necessarily far in the future, since his finances were slender, and the expense of a voyage to or from Canada was no slight matter.

In the mean time, our home life went on uneventfully: nothing seemed to be happening at the time, but in looking back, I can see that my father was gradually growing more and more feeble: and 'one thing used invariably to produce a bad effect upon his health; which was a letter from James. George had told me that James appeared to be living in a style exceeding his means, and that no one knew how he managed it, if he did not get into debt; and that more than once he had been in close association with men whose set was not regarded as a desirable one for any young man to join. My father had heard these rumours, and they had made him uneasy: for though there was no positive wickedness about James, his character was weak and self-indulgent, and he was easily led by any one whom he happened to be with. My father wrote to beg him to come to Highthorpe in the vacation, but he made some excuse, and went on the Continent with some friends instead. So that all that year passed without any meeting between him and my father: the latter was, from ill-health, unable to go up to London to see James, and warn him in person of the consequences of his extravagance; and

James's unwillingness to come down to Highthorpe to see his father hurt him more than my eldest brother could have imagined, or he must have consented to come. However, 'Il n'y a rien ici bas qui ne trouve sa pente,' and James's folly was leading, swiftly and surely, to its natural consequences.

III.

A SORRY CHRISTMAS.

'Sit thee by the ingle, when
 The sear fagot blazes bright,
 Spirit of a winter's night :
 When the soundless earth is muffled,
 And the caked snow is shuffled
 From the ploughboy's heavy shoon.'—KEATS.

IT was Christmas Eve. George and I had stirred the pudding, drunk the hot elder wine which Dawson always brought in in honour of the season, and which every year I vainly attempted to like : the whole of the day we had been helping the old clerk to decorate the church in the old style—sprigs of holly stuck in the woodwork of the pews, till the church looked like ' Birnam wood come to Dunsinane.' We had had prayers, and were just preparing to go to bed, when there came a ring at the hall-door ; and there appeared the figure of James upon the mat, his shaggy

coat powdered with snow, dripping into a pool as it melted.

We had not expected him, for he had written to say that he should not be able to come home this Christmas: but we supposed that he had thought better of it. George began to congratulate him on having changed his mind, and come down to spend Christmas with us, instead of keeping it all by himself in his dreary London chambers; but I saw that James was not attending to what he said: he looked nervous and frightened, and I said, 'Is anything the matter?'

'The matter, you foolish child? what should there be? Just get me something to eat and then go to bed, for I am come home to speak to my father, and not for your eternal chatter.'

'You haven't brought a civil tongue in your head, at least,' said George.

'Come, boys, don't wrangle to-night,' said my father. 'Go and find something to eat, Cecy, and bring it in to us here. I will hear James's business to-night.'

James muttered something about to-morrow doing

as well : it was evident that he was uneasy about the coming interview : but my father said, 'No, James ; to-night.'

I went to ask Dawson for some provisions. 'Dawson, let him have some of that potted meat : he always likes that.'

'Bless your heart alive, Miss Cecy, I didn't make that there for he.' James was at no time a favourite with Dawson. 'I made that o' purpose against Master George come home from school : and Mr James may have a bit of cold meat if he likes, but nothing more : *he ain't* here after no good.'

George and I had come to the same conclusion : and we sat in the kitchen, according to our wont, while James was talking to my father. While we were there the Christmas waits came round. They came to that side of the house out of consideration to my father's ill-health ; and we unbarred the shutter and opened the window to hear the familiar sounds. I can see and hear it now : the sharp night air entering through the open window, the lanterns dimly showing us the sturdy muffled-up figures in the yard, and then, the pitch being given, 'While

shepherds watched' was started in that dear old rolling tune, full of trills and quavers, which I always regret has passed away before modern church improvements, and we of the old school hear no longer. How I used to delight in the repetition of the last line, when the bass rolled out alone, 'And glory shone,' then the alto, 'And glory shone around,' and then all three parts came down grandly upon the key-note at the end. Then the following dialogue usually took place:—

'A happy Christmas to you all, sir; long may you live, and happy may you be.'

'The same to you, Dixon. Will you have a mug of beer to keep the cold out?'

Thereupon the men nudged one another, and a chorus of, 'If ye please, sir,' came from all of them.

Then the waits went away: but we did not shut the window, and presently we heard the carol, fainter in the distance, raised again at the nearest farmhouse. We listened till the last cadence of 'Begin and never cease,' died away in the sharp air: and then we shut the window, barred the shutter, and cowered down into the fire. Almost at the same

moment George was called into the parlour, and I remained in the kitchen; the Christmas thoughts which the carol had brought me strangely confused and intermixed with present anxieties, and a vague sense of coming evil, for which I could not in any way account.

I remained there for about half an hour, when I heard James go up-stairs to his room, and George called out to me, 'Are you there still, Cecy? Bring papa a glass of wine: he is not well.' And I obeyed, and entering the parlour in some trepidation with the wine, saw my father leaning back in his chair, with his eyes closed. The wine seemed to restore him a little, but his steps were very feeble as he mounted the stairs to his room: and when I left him, I resolved that I would call in our village doctor, who attended him, the next morning after church. Then I descended again to the parlour, where George was standing with his back to the fire and an expression on his face which I had never seen there before.

'James has done for us nicely this time,' was his remark, 'and himself too.'

'Why, what has happened, George?'

Then he told me that James was in debt for two thousand pounds, and his creditors would wait no longer. He had only escaped being apprehended by promising to come down to Highthorpe at once and consult his father as to what arrangements could be made towards repayment. George told me how James and our father had both looked when he entered : James nervous and restless, moving aimlessly about in shrinking shame ; our father grave, silent, and calm. He told me how his father had made known to him in stern but just language what James's extravagance had led to, and how, in order to free him from his debts, nearly the whole of the money which had been laid by for George's education and for a future provision for me, must be sacrificed. And then,' George said, 'he asked me whether I would consent to this, so that our name might not be dishonoured ; or whether I would hold to my rights : for he said he could not commit injustice to one son by paying for the folly of the other, without my consent.'

'Of course you said he must.'

'Of course : there was nothing else to be done. So I must leave Winchester at once, and give up all

hope of Oxford, and find some work directly—turn clerk in some musty counting-house, if I have the good fortune to find a place,’ and he laid his head upon his arms and sighed deeply.

‘Oh, George, how horrid! But why can’t you get a scholarship of some sort, and still go to Oxford?’

‘It would not half support me if I could; and I must earn money instead of spending it. And, Cecy, papa spoke about you. He said that he looked to me for taking charge of you when I was a man, for he could not trust to James.’

‘Dear old George,’ I whispered with unwonted effusion, feeling how happy I was to have such a brother.

‘It is all very well to take it like that,’ said George. ‘But it is awfully hard upon both of us, as you will know some day.’

‘How could James be so wicked!’ I said after a pause, my warmth a little cooled by George’s last speech.

‘James is a selfish fool,’ said George bitterly. ‘If he can do what he likes for the moment he never

thinks of the consequences. Well! catch me ever spending one penny that does not belong to me!’

It was a wise resolve, and wisely and well kept to this day. George gathered that good at least out of his first great trouble, which however was very great to him at first. He looked as if he had hardly slept at all the next morning when he came down-stairs—to find only me at the table, for James was too much ashamed of himself, I suppose, to appear, and my father was too ill to leave his bed.

That was a dreary Christmas-day. My father sent me to church in the morning, though I hardly liked to go, he seemed so ill: and that was the beginning of a long fit of illness, the worst attack he had ever had. Perhaps the anxiety which we three all shared together at this time drew us to one another, and made George and me more compassionate towards James than anything else could have done. He needed pity, poor fellow: he was half wild with remorse and shame; he thought that our father’s illness was his doing, and his grief and repentance were most bitter; and the first ray of comfort which came to him was when the doctor pronounced that

our father was out of danger. He burst into tears and sobbed like a child.

George faced his trouble like a man, and found it less hard than he imagined beforehand. He applied to a schoolfellow whose father was in a large tea business, to know if he could do anything for him in the way of getting him something for to do : and the consequence was an invitation from the father, a Mr Brown, to come and stay for a few days with him. They liked one another equally : and at the end of a week George returned with the joyful intelligence that he had been offered a situation with a fair salary, to rise as he went on ; that the duties were not particularly onerous, and that games of hockey and cricket would be attainable on summer evenings. By March he was comfortably installed in his new duties ; and as he had in him the making of an extremely good man of business, he soon learnt his work and became valuable to his employers.

James professed also to be looking out for a tutorship : he intended entirely to give up the study of law, which had never been serious with him, and now had to cease for want of means. But with our

father's danger, the intensity of James's sorrow passed away also, and it often made me angry to see how very little energy he threw into his search for employment. Six months, nine, a year passed, and he was still at home ; employing his mornings in reading the newspaper, and his afternoons in sauntering about, shooting or otherwise amusing himself. Sometimes he made me take a walk with him : but this was not always within my power, as I had my hands pretty full of home occupations, and a great deal of my time was necessarily taken up in attending to my father, who had never regained the point of strength where he had been before this last attack of illness. My lessons had to be entirely given up, except those that I could do by myself : sometimes my father set me a chapter of Hooker or Butler to read, and we discussed it afterwards : but I was not able to follow any regular course of study. I had even to leave off practising my music, because the parlour was just below my father's bedroom, and the sound disturbed him in the mornings, the only time I could spare for practice. My visits to Estford, too, had to be given up : and one day Mrs Baron arrived at our house, and by her

own desire was shown in to my father. If I had guessed that her object was to remonstrate with him on the subject of my education, I would have kept her out by every means in my power.

After the necessary inquiries as to health, and recommendations of certain infallible nostrums from our visitor, she went at once into the subject. 'The fact is, Mr Hope, I came principally to represent to you a few things about Cecy's education. It is such a bad thing for a girl to be so idle at her time of life.'

My father smiled as he said, 'Cecy is not idle, I assure you. She is as busy a little woman as can be: she nurses me, and helps Dawson, and attends to the school, and visits the sick people—'

'Ah yes, I dare say: but her education, Mr Hope. This is the time when you ought to send her to some good school, that she might learn something. Why, she is a mere child—how old are you, Cecy?'

'Just fifteen.'

'And no lessons since last Christmas! Mr Hope, you are letting her waste the most precious time of her life.'

'She is not wasting it, I hope,' said my father

gently. His manner was a great contrast to Mrs Baron's, who laid down the law as if no one had a right to differ from her.

‘Well, I will tell you what I think it necessary for my girls to do. Nine hours’ lessons every day—I will not allow less than that: and even with that they have not time for all that I want them to do. Two hours of that time are taken up with practising—of course, no one can pretend to be a good musician without devoting as much time as that to it: then there is French, and German, and Italian, and a little Spanish—besides history, and geography, and things of that sort, which every one has to learn, of course. And drawing and painting besides.’

‘They will be very accomplished young ladies, I have no doubt,’ said my father; ‘which my little Cecy will never have the chance of being. But though I should be glad for her to have more time for study, we cannot manage it just now: so she must be content to go on as she does at present.’

‘And you really will not let her come back to Estford with me to share the girls’ lessons? I assure

you, Mr Hope,' said Mrs Baron, who had a kind heart under all her love of rule, 'it would be the best thing possible for her: and I would take the same care of her as if she were my own child.'

'You are very kind,' he answered, 'but I am afraid I cannot spare her. I am not likely to last many more years, and I cannot send my little girl away from me; but thank you all the same for your kind offer.'

Mrs Baron, rather piqued by my father's refusal, soon after took her leave. He was rather silent that afternoon, and did not answer as readily as usual to my attempts at conversation, but before James came in to tea, he said to me,—

'I am very sorry, Cecy, for your sake, that I cannot manage for you to have some better education than you have at present. Not that I should care particularly for you to know all the ologies which those Miss Barons seem to be learning; but I should have liked you to be thoroughly well-taught, not picking up bits and scraps of knowledge here and there as you do. I should like to know that you would be able to provide for yourself, if

need so required : for you know you will have very little to live on when I die—not much more than £30 a year.’

‘But, papa,’ I said, choking down the involuntary shiver that came over me as I thought of the possibility to which he referred, ‘George would always let me live with him : and I might be able to teach very little children.’

‘Your brothers may marry, my dear, and I know you would not like to feel a burden upon them. However, Cecy, I do not feel that your real education—not what Mrs Baron calls so, but what I call so—your true preparation for the work of life—is being neglected all this time. That is a preparation that people do not lay aside with their French grammars when they are eighteen.’

‘I suppose it goes on until people marry—or settle down into old maids,’ I said thoughtfully.

He smiled gravely. ‘Far longer than that, Cecy, if you look at it in one point of view—for the whole work of life becomes a preparation for the work we shall have to do in the next world ; and if we live to be a hundred, our education is not yet complete.

Never rest upon your oars, my child, and fancy you have learnt all that is worth learning: as fast as you have learnt one lesson, another will open out before you.'

'Then one always has to go on and on, learning more and more, and cannot stop a minute,' I said. 'All one's life is a very long time: I wish one could have some holidays now and then.'

'My dear, holidays are only a change in what children learn; they are as much part of their education as the working months of the year. And so the lessons which we have to learn are not all the same: some are hard, some are easy and pleasant, some are new to us, some are only repetition of what we have learnt before, or putting it in practice. And our Master is very patient with us, and never gives us lessons which we are not clever enough to learn.'

But it came round to our ears that Mrs Baron had complained to a neighbour that 'Mr Hope was so obstinate that he would not see the force of what she had tried to persuade him about Cecy's education: there was the child running wild, without any one to see after her, and yet he persisted in refusing to send her to me. Fearfully blind, and selfish too, I

call it : for what can you expect the girl to turn out after such a bringing up ? ’

Somehow, after this, the Barons were not nearly so cordial towards us as they had been. Alice and Edith were growing up tall, thin, fair girls, with tolerable features, but no expression, and hair of exactly the same shade of light lustreless brown. The period of lengthening dresses came to all of us about the same time : but I had to encounter their scorn—which happily was not so serious to me now as it once had been—when they saw my still diminutive stature promoted to the same honour that they had arrived at, being a head and shoulders taller than I was. Alas ! with all advantages of long dresses, I was still only little Cecy Hope, and so was fated to remain to the end of the chapter.

But small though I was in height (not quite five feet when full-grown), in this year I had passed from a child to a woman. I ceased to be a child on that Christmas Eve when James had come into our hall with the snow on his coat. My father’s illness, and the grave responsibilities which it threw upon me, had taken from me the reckless spirits of childhood ;

and I found that even my brothers, usually the latest to own the advent of womanhood in a younger sister, now accorded to me my privileges as grown up. Only Dawson still persisted in looking upon me as a child: scolding me, as if I were six years old, when I came in wet or with my dress torn, and never obeying any order given by me unless accompanied by a large amount of coaxing. I would not have borne it from any one else: but I loved my dear old nurse too much not to submit to her rule and petting: and many a time since then have I longed to have both back again.

IV.

MRS JOHNSON, OF EASTWOOD.

‘ If you trust before you try
You will repent before you die.’—OLD CATCH.

‘ CECY, put on your hat,’ said James one cold day in November, ‘ and come and call with me at Eastwood.’

‘ Why, who lives there?’ I asked : for Eastwood was an old rambling house about two miles off, at the bottom of the hill, and had long been uninhabited.

‘ Why, did you not hear Steele talking about her? It is a Mrs Johnson, the widow of Johnson’s Cough Pills. You must have seen them advertised—a quack medicine, I believe, with no end of testimonials underneath.’

‘ But why must we go and call on a quack’s widow who does not live in our parish?’

‘Everybody is calling upon her: and the cough pills have proved lucrative, by all accounts.’

‘I don’t see why we need,’ I rejoined: for in those days I was extremely aristocratic, and was exceedingly proud of some Hope who had fallen at Flodden Field, and who was said by some authorities to be an ancestor of ours, while others declared it all a mistake.

‘We must be civil, that is why. Now mind, Cecy, your tidiest things: I won’t take you with me in that old brown cloak that you ought to throw into the fire:’—and I obeyed, and arrayed myself in my Sunday black cloth jacket, and black hat with scarlet feather,—the last a present from George. We had a damp and dreary walk, under the dripping boughs, between the leafless hedgerows, where the last summer’s leaves were rotting on their twigs: for the November storms had not yet set in to clear away the fogs and the dead vegetation, and purify the air for the coming winter. It was a pleasant change to find ourselves in a pretty drawing-room with a bright fire in it, which lit up the whole room, the day was so dark, though it was not nearly time for

the sun to set. We waited some five minutes before Mrs Johnson came in.

She was handsomely dressed in a high black velvet dress, with violet trimmings; and the little lace cap, at the back of her head, had the least possible suggestion of widowhood about it. She was tall, and had a good figure and regular features,—very black hair, and very white teeth, and the loveliest bloom, I thought, I had ever seen. Her forehead was narrow, and her eyes rather too light; but then the arched eyebrows were so beautifully marked! She was certainly a striking-looking person, and I could not help admiring her; yet somehow I felt rather repelled than attracted by her. It was feminine instinct, I suppose; for she had easy, lady-like manners, and though her voice was thin, there would have been nothing unpleasant about it if she had not modulated it so very carefully.

James was soon in animated conversation with ‘the widow of Johnson’s Cough Pills.’ I was too shy to talk much, so I looked about the room for amusement. I saw no book upon the table except the ‘Book of Beauty,’ which I opened, and found to

contain various smirking ladies and inane stories. Presently the door opened, and a little girl of four years old entered. Little children generally have some beauty about them—either in colouring, expression, or soft plump limbs; but little Rosalie Johnson had none; in fact, I doubt whether she considered herself a little child at all. She wore a very short worked white frock, displaying a pair of lean bare legs: her scanty black hair hung down her back in what were meant for curls, but looked like lanky rats' tails; and her little sallow face looked wizened and peevish. Poor little child, I believe she was thoroughly spoilt; indulgence had hurt both her temper and her health, and the amount of happiness enjoyed by the petted heiress of 'the Cough Pills' was much less than that of the fat, toddling little mortals, with dirty faces and tangled hair, who make mud pies in the gutters in the intervals of Infant School. I tried to coax her to come to me, but in vain; she sidled up to her mother, and after many entreaties, obtained what it seemed she had come for—a piece of sugar—after which she departed as she had come.

Mrs Johnson would not allow us to go without hospitably forcing afternoon tea upon us; and a remarkably pretty set of cups were brought in, each cup and saucer of a different pattern. At last we set off homewards, and I found James in raptures with everything at Eastwood, from the tea-cups to Mrs Johnson's dress. I could not participate in his admiration; all I could say was that the drawing-room was pretty, and Mrs Johnson very hospitable; and he grew quite angry with me for my want of appreciation.

'Well, James,' I said, 'I hope you will find her as pleasant as you think she is: if she really is so, she will be a nice neighbour.'

'Of course, if you make up your mind she is not pleasant, and stick to it, you will not find her so.'

'I don't want to make up my mind; only I have not fallen in love at first sight.'

'Neither have I,' said James; but after-events seemed rather to disprove his disclaimer.

Mrs Johnson returned her call within a fortnight. I was sitting in the study with my father, reading and discussing Butler's Analogy, when her ring was

heard at the bell. I hoped it might be only some one come to see James, who was out, but, to my horror, I found myself wanted in the parlour by a lady, who was sitting on the sofa with her little girl. It was Mrs Johnson and Rosalie. I tried to entertain my visitor as well as I could : she was very gracious, but rather more patronizing than I liked ; and I might as well have tried to 'harp fish out of the water, or water out of a stone,'—as to get an answer out of Rosalie. When we had discussed the respective merits of Eastwood at the bottom of the hill, and Highthorpe at the top, and remarked how suddenly the winter had come upon us, I was at my wits' end to know how to continue the conversation. To my great delight, I caught sight of James crossing the garden, and, hastily opening the window, ran out to call him. He came in immediately, apologizing much more than I thought he need have done for my want of consideration in leaving the window open. Thenceforward my task of hostess was a sinecure. James and Mrs Johnson talked and chatted for at least half an hour without the latter showing any disposition to go ; and when at last she

made a move, he detained her by offering her tea, and ringing the bell to order it. The bell was answered by Carry King, now established in the house as helper to Dawson: she opened the door, looking comely and bright, as she could not help doing, with her blue eyes, rosy cheeks, and red smiling lips; but, unfortunately, she had forgotten to take off a coarse apron in which she had been scrubbing the kitchen.

‘Caroline,’ said James with dignity, ‘bring in some tea.’

Carry’s eyes grew round with astonishment from two causes. First, she had never heard herself called Caroline before, having always been Carry all her life. Secondly, the order for tea in the middle of the afternoon was utterly unheard of in our primitive household. In her surprise she left the door ajar, and I distinctly heard the following conversation between her and Dawson.

‘Tea at this time o’ day, girl? Why, your wits must ha’ been wool-gathering. They’ve only done dinner an hour.’

‘I’m sure, Mrs Dawson, he said tea; and he called me Caroline; and I never knowed him do

the one or the other before : I think he must be ill, or something.'

'A poor tuly chicken he always was,' said Dawson, 'pecking and picking over good food : what he should want tea for now, I can't think.'

But at this point I slipped into the kitchen, and Carry's costume being so unpresentable, I volunteered to take the tea in myself : this was not a new task to me, nor one that I considered it below my dignity to fulfil. But I noticed that James looked very much annoyed, and Mrs Johnson amused; and on the whole, I suppose it is not customary for people fashionable enough to require afternoon tea to bring it in themselves.

When Mrs Johnson was gone, I slipped in to my father, and made him laugh by describing Dawson's and Carry's perplexities, and the history of the afternoon tea : and I described to him Mrs Johnson, and James's devotion to her. 'Devoted, indeed,' he said. 'How old do you think the lady is, Cecy ?'

'I don't know : she is good-looking, and has a lovely colour : but I don't think she can be very young.'

‘ I should like to see them together, and judge for myself whether this is all the work of a certain little maid who can sometimes be imaginative, or whether there is sober truth in it, and any chance of James’s settling down.’

‘ O papa, you don’t think there is any idea of its coming to anything? I don’t like her well enough, nearly, to think of James marrying her.’

‘ Well, Cecy,’ he said with a smile, ‘ we have scanty means of judging, it must be owned : you have seen them together twice, and I have heard your account of what took place. But, seriously, my little woman, I hope, whenever your brothers do marry, you will try heartily to like their wives. I have so often seen families estranged or growing indifferent to one another because the husbands’ sisters do not like the wife, or the wife’s sisters do not like the husband, and I should be sorry to think that anything of that sort would happen with you three.’

‘ I know I shall like George’s wife, whoever she may be,’ I remarked.

‘ I hope you will ; and James’s also ; for you see, my dear, my health is very uncertain, and if I were to

die, your natural home would be with James if he married. It would be much better for you than living alone in lodgings with George, though I believe he would take as much care of you as any one could ; but still you would be left alone almost all day, and you are too young for that at present.'

These sort of things were so simply and naturally said, that they no longer pained me as they would once have done, and besides, as I said to reassure myself, my father was not the least more likely to die because his arrangements were settled as to what we were to do if he did.

For the present our conversation ended : and before long James and I were invited to dinner at Eastwood, which he accepted, and I declined, as my father did not think me old enough at present for regular dinner-parties. He returned home as much charmed with 'the widow of the Cough Pills' as ever ; though when once I spoke to him of her by that name he was very indignant, and lectured me upon unlady-like epithets. George came home at Christmas, and was as much amused by watching the

progress of the flirtation as I was ; for we would not allow to ourselves that it would ever come to anything more : we made up our minds that Mrs Johnson would not think of accepting James if he proposed to her, and I had almost begun to look upon him as the future victim of a broken heart, crazed by cruel scorn like the knight in Coleridge's *Genevieve*. George laughed at my romance, but made me the confidant of a desperate attachment on his own account, to the eldest Miss Brown, who must have been at least ten years older than he was : but his spirits were not in the least affected, and we had a very merry Christmas—a great contrast to the last.

‘My dear Saint Cecilia,’ he said one day when we had been discussing James, after having watched him ‘philandering,’ as Dawson called it, for a whole afternoon with Mrs Johnson, ‘don’t you see that if it ever comes to anything, it will be because each has what the other wants? She has money ; James has none : James, I am happy to say, comes of a decently-old family ; which if she does (which I doubt), Johnson’s Cough Pills did not.’

‘I am sure, whatever she may do, James would not marry her for money. He would not be so mean and horrid.’

‘Well, I suppose he is really in love with her—how he can be, I can’t understand. It would be a long time before I was. But the world in general will put it down to money: you will see if they don’t.’

‘Then they are very uncharitable, and I don’t see what right they have to impute motives.’

‘They take the right if it is not theirs. Well, Cecy, you’ll see that if it does come off, James will not be the master; he will be under his wife’s thumb, and as awfully henpecked as ever husband was. If that woman has not got a strong will and a sharp temper—’

‘I don’t think it is at all a thing to laugh at, George,’ I said. ‘I would much sooner cry over it, if there really is anything likely to come of it; for papa won’t like her, and you don’t like her, and I don’t like her, and you think James won’t be happy with her. Oh, why will the wrong people go and fall in love?’

‘ Well, Saint Cecilia, my dear, don’t distress yourself before the time comes : she is very likely to refuse him if he does propose.’

With which brotherly consolation I was obliged to be contented : and soon after my fears were lulled to sleep for a little while ; for Mrs Johnson left Eastwood for two months in order to pay a visit to some relations in the north ; and James seemed, upon the whole, very well contented in her absence. My father’s health seemed to be improving a little, and he was better than he had ever been since his last illness : so much so, that I was able to resume my studies regularly with him, though I begged off going to Estford for the French lessons ; for I did not like asking favours of Mrs Baron, and besides, going to Estford took me from home the whole of the day, which I could ill afford to do. So I grew up without any accomplishment except classical music, learnt of the organist, utterly unavailable for society—in fact, as I heard Alice Baron kindly describing me one day, ‘ a perfect little ignoramus.’

V.

THE FAIRLEIGH PICNIC.

'She spake—and lo, her loveliness
 Methought she damaged with her tongue :
 And every sentence made it less,
 So false they rung.'—JEAN INGELow.

'**M**RS JOHNSON has got up a picnic for Tuesday, Cecy, and asked me to bring you,' said James, one bright day in the spring, when the young leaves were bursting out into their early greenness.

'O James, how delightful! Where is it to be? Oh, I have never been to a picnic in my life!'

'The castle at Fairleigh. Not that there is much to see there: but it is as good for an object as any other.'

'Fairleigh! then that will take up the whole day. I shall have to leave you for such a long time, papa: I don't like that.'

'Never mind, little woman: Dawson will take

good care of me while you are gone, and you will have so much to tell me when you come back, that I shall feel as if I had been out myself. You have not had any change for a long time.'

So it was settled that I was to go: and I abandoned myself without reserve to my happy anticipations. After all, I was not quite sixteen, and in my secluded life, a piece of gaiety was something quite intoxicating in prospect. How many times I consulted the glass, and inspected my best frock, and wished for a more summer-like hat than that black one with the scarlet feather! And somehow, in the nick of time—on the very day which gave time for me and Dawson to make up a dress before Tuesday—arrived a parcel from George, containing a dress of pretty soft delicate grey, the very thing I wanted. My father was pleased at my pleasure, and forbore to make any warning remarks beyond recommending me not to spend all my energies in anticipation, and have none left for enjoyment: but he looked rather grave at my very melancholy looks when it clouded over on Monday afternoon and a slight shower fell. But on Tuesday there was a

cloudless sky, and my spirits were as high as possible. I arrayed myself in my new dress, to the satisfaction of James: and then, having arranged everything I could think of for my father's comfort, we set off to walk to Eastwood.

Ah, when I think of the glad childish anticipation with which I prepared for that picnic, and the reality which followed my anticipation,—I could pity myself, even now. It was the first time that I learnt by experience that a party of pleasure is often very hard work, and seldom justifies its title by the amount of pleasure which it gives. We found nearly all the party assembled at Eastwood, except those who were to drive straight to Fairleigh Castle. Mrs Johnson herself had offered to convey me and James: and besides us and little Rosalie, the carriage also held a tall, dark-complexioned girl whom she called Barbara, and whose surname I afterwards discovered to be Talbot.

Barbara Talbot was certainly a person of striking appearance, though 'pretty' would have been the last word to be applied to her. She had fine dark eyes, and features which were rather too marked, perhaps:

her mouth was apt to look stern when her countenance was at rest, and there was a certain proud self-consciousness about every movement which betrayed her character. But she had a most magnificent figure, and a Spanish lady need not have been ashamed of her walk. She was not like other people, either in appearance, manners, or mind ; she was apt to think for herself, and what she thought she spoke. A mother's care or a sister's influence might have made her different : but Barbara had neither mother nor sister, nor even brother : she was the only and idolized child of the great scientific traveller, Professor Talbot, in whose eyes she was perfect and incomparable, and who spoilt her to his heart's content.

She employed the drive in studying the faces of both me and James, putting me considerably out of countenance by doing so. Whenever I looked up, I saw the dark eyes fixed upon my face in a way which I could hardly call staring, for they were not withdrawn when I looked up, but seemed to be deliberately examining me as if I were a curious plant or animal. I thought that I should like to know what her conclusions were respecting me, but I was much

too shy to aid her in her researches by entering into conversation with her.

At last we arrived at our destination—Fairleigh Castle: it was in ruins, and the remains which we were to see consisted of one tower, three walls, a broken arch, and several heaps of rubbish. But its situation was very pretty, on a furzy knoll from which shady meadows sloped down to a slow broad river, whose banks were gay with spring flowers. The first thing to do was to see and shake hands with the rest of the world as they descended from their carriages: but as I knew no one except the Barons and Mr Taylor, the curate of Estford, I found this rather dull. Then every one went to look at the ruins, but they were rather uninteresting, and soon almost every one was in the pretty field, except Mr Baron and Professor Talbot, who were deep in an argument upon the moulding of an arch.

‘How is it you don’t join in that learned conversation?’ said some one to Miss Talbot, who replied, ‘I am improving myself by the study of character: there are plenty of varieties here.’ And soon she came to my side, and put some leading questions, as

I imagined, for the sake of drawing me out: but I responded not very warmly, for I thought it was very hard that my character should be made a study of, whether I liked it or not. So by-and-by I withdrew from my companion, and took refuge with my contemporaries the Barons. They had grown into fashionable young ladies, in spring silks and bonnets, which seemed to be productive of more pain than pleasure, at least to Edith, who confided to me that it was the first day she had worn hers. She also told me that she wished she was out, as Alice was, for Alice had had Captain Robinson talking to her all the way, and she had had nobody: and that my dress looked very nice, but why did I wear my winter hat? 'To be sure, Cecy,' she said, 'it is quite wonderful how you are improved in looks. Several people said that you looked quite pretty: and I always said it was owing to mamma and all the pains she has taken with you.'

Somehow, I did not see the force of the last observation, but a little spice of flattery does not by any means come amiss to a girl under sixteen. Then came another question on a less pleasant subject.

‘Do tell me, is your brother James engaged to Mrs Johnson? Everybody is saying he is, and what a good thing it is for him.’

‘Not to my knowledge,’ I said.

‘Oh, I hope he will be, and you must ask us to the wedding—mind you do, Cecy. I have never been to a wedding but once: people never marry about here.’

‘I wish they never might,’ was on the tip of my tongue: but Edith Baron was not exactly the confidante I should choose to confide in as to my feelings towards a lady who might one day be my sister-in-law.

My next companion was Mr Taylor, the Estford curate,—a pleasant little man, but rather shy: he knew me, as he often came to see my father, and we were very good friends. We walked the length of the field by the river and back again, and then I saw Mrs Baron beckoning to me with her parasol. I did not love Mrs Baron, and I disliked being beckoned by a parasol: however, I obeyed the movement and went to her.

‘Cecy, my dear,’ she said, ‘I only wanted to

remind you that you are growing up now, and should be careful. People will make remarks on you if they see you walking with a gentleman like Mr Taylor. You need not look so angry, my dear : I tell it you for your good.'

I do not know whether I was angry, but I reddened to the roots of my hair, and felt inclined to cry. I thought I must have done something very dreadful, which every one would always remember, for such a thing even to be mentioned ; and I inwardly resolved not to speak to Mr Taylor again if I could help it. A girl's first attack of self-consciousness is a very uncomfortable thing.

Then came eating : and as Mr Taylor was sitting next to me, and I was much too shy to speak to him, it may be imagined that I was very glad when it was over. Then, fearful of outraging any more proprieties, I left the party and sat down in a comfortable nook among the blossoming broom on the knoll on which the castle stood, from which I could see a long way down a deep shady lane, cut deep between two high banks,—so shady that here and there one could see a few late primroses half hidden among their

luxuriant leaves, even though it was May, and the young fern fronds were beginning to uncurl.

I cannot say that the lane was a scene of much excitement. A donkey, two children, and a boy driving a pig, passed down it during the time that I sat there. But it was very pleasant there, and there were no proprieties to be outraged : and I sat there, thinking of nothing in particular, until I saw two figures at the end of the lane—Mrs Johnson, sitting on the step of a stile, and James leaning against the post. They were in the most approved attitude of rural courtship in pictures. Her head was bent down, but he had taken her hand and she did not withdraw it. Was it true, then ? Was he really making her an offer and she accepting him ?

Certainly, my first feeling was one of blank dismay. I could not complain of its having come upon me suddenly, but yet I had never realized it until now. George and I had talked about it, times and again ; but yet somehow I had never felt what it would really be until this moment. I did not like Mrs Johnson, I did not think my father would like her, and I did not think that she was a woman who could make

James happy. She would disturb our peaceful life: she would come and worry my father: and oh! should I have to call that miserable little spoilt Rosalie my niece?

But at this climax I began to feel that my reflections were rather selfish. At least, whatever I might think of it in my own mind, it would not do to show James that I disapproved of his choice. I only hoped that he would not ask me what I thought of her. But perhaps, after all, she might improve on further acquaintance: she must love James, I thought, or why should she accept him? though even there George's insinuation came into my mind. Oh, to be at home again, and talk it over with my father!

I rose up and proceeded down the knoll to join the rest of the party: in my hands I had a bunch of golden broom and white may. But before I had gone far I heard James's voice behind me, 'Cecy, wait a minute!' and looking round I saw him and Mrs Johnson following me, having left the lane by the stile where I had seen them talking together, and so entered the same field lower down. I stopped

until they came up, and then James said, 'Let me introduce you to your new sister Augusta, Cecy.'

I have a vague idea of what happened next, or of how I returned Mrs Johnson's rapturous embraces. I believe I managed to kiss James, and say, 'I hope you will be happy;' but as to returning Mrs Johnson's enthusiastic expressions of affection, that was beyond my power. She nearly made me laugh when in the midst of one of her raptures she caught sight of my bunch of flowers, and asked me for it, saying, 'You must give it me, dear little Cecy! I shall value it so much from *you!*'

I gave it to her, and she turned to James, 'Cecy is like a wild-flower herself, I think: this is a most appropriate present. I shall be *so* fond of my dear little sister!' and she kissed me again. I hardly knew whether to laugh or to cry: but when they had passed on I went back to my nest in the broom, and cried bitterly.

A stranger's foot-fall aroused me: and looking up I saw Barbara Talbot. I hastily rose, brushed off my tears, and tried to look as if nothing was the matter; but she had seen me. 'I did not mean to

disturb you,' she said, ' but is anything the matter? Have you hurt yourself? '

' No, thank you, nothing is the matter,' I answered in as off-hand a way as I could, conscious all the while that my red eyes must betray me, and somewhat affronted by her question.

' I thought you were here,' she went on, ' and people are beginning to talk about going. But come down the lane: there is a nice little spring there where you can wash your face and make yourself comfortable, and then we can go back.' I obeyed her injunction—it was so like Barbara as I knew her afterwards not to ignore the fact of my having cried, as so many would have done, but to do her best to repair the consequences.

She made me bathe my eyes, and produced some Eau de Cologne from a dainty little scent-bottle, to take away the redness, without asking me a single question. Suddenly a thought came into my mind—' You won't tell '—I was going to say Mrs Johnson, but I changed it into—' anybody, that you found me crying? '

She looked at me as if to read my thoughts, and

then said with a smile, 'No, I won't tell anybody. I may have my ideas upon the subject, but I won't communicate them. And now you are not going to cry any more, at least till you get home. I suppose you would rather not come in to the supper at Eastwood.'

'No, thank you: I must go home to papa.'

I began to feel that Barbara must have shrewd suspicion of the state of affairs; and I somehow felt myself almost like a baby in her hands. I did not dream of disobeying anything she told me to do: I felt so tired and nerveless, and she seemed so firm and strong-willed, that her influence over me was almost mesmeric.

The carriages were starting when we joined the rest of the party. Barbara and I went back as we had come, except that she mercifully left off studying my character: and when we parted, she gave me a kiss on my forehead, which surprised me and charmed me not a little. I found myself wondering, as I walked home, where and when I should see her again: and my mind was thus a little diverted from the weight of cares which had been pressing upon it, with the acquisition of my new sister-in-law.

Weary in body and mind I reached home, and entered the study. My father was sitting in his chair, calm and placid as ever, but neither reading nor writing: his eyes were fixed upon the golden western sky, which shone through the garden trees, and his thoughts were evidently far away. But my coming roused him. 'Home at last, little woman!' he said; 'it is rather late, is it not?'

It was in reality rather earlier than the time at which I had proposed to be back, and I knew that he had missed me and found the time long: and I resolved never to leave him for so long again.

'Have you enjoyed your holiday, Cecy?'

'No, papa,' I burst out crying, and between my sobs managed to get out, 'James is engaged to Mrs Johnson.'

'Engaged at last!' he said, quietly. 'I thought they were never going to make up their minds. Well, I hope she will make him happy, poor fellow. But Cecy, my child, don't make yourself miserable about it: what is the matter?'

'I don't like her,' I repeated, 'I don't like her at all: and George does not like her either: and I think

think she is affected, and says what she does not mean.'

'I hope you are mistaken, my dear; but one thing you may be sure of, that it matters less to you and George than it does to James, what she may be.'

'Indeed, papa, it is not altogether because I am selfish. I mean to try to be kind to her for James's sake: but I don't like her, and I'm sure I never shall.'

'Hush, hush, little woman!' and he took my two hands in his. 'Shall I tell you what that last speech of yours shows you to be?—prejudiced. You know very little of her, and you don't like her manner: and so you will go on, shutting your eyes to all her good points, and finding out all her bad ones, and the effect will be the same as if I took this chair-cover'—pointing to a striped black and white chintz—'and showed it to you, having first covered up all the white stripes, and told you it was black.'

'Well, papa, perhaps I am prejudiced: but I can't say I like her, because I don't.'

'My dear, I don't want you to say anything you don't feel. All I ask you to do is not to pre-judge. I dare say we shall see her faults, and she will see

ours : new connections entering a family are very apt to see and to be seen in the worst light. Only let us try to make the best of her, and let us hope that she will try to make the best of us.'

We quitted the subject for the time, but it was none the less in our minds: and when I bid my father good-night, he said, 'It would be a great weight off my mind, Cecy, if I thought you had a sister-in-law whom you could thoroughly love and trust. For you know, in the case of my death, as I told you before, your natural home would be with James.

I could not help shrinking closer to him as I knelt by his side and said, 'But you are much better than you were, papa—*please* don't talk about that.'

His answer was only a silent kiss. I did not know then what I knew afterwards—that he was aware that he was not really better, and that sooner or later, before many months were over, the end *must* come.

But he could not bear to give me pain to-night, after my tiring and harassing day : so we said good-night and parted.

VI.

A WEDDING AND A FUNERAL.

'O life descending unto death,
 Our waking eyes behold
 Parent and friend thy lapse attend,
 Companions young and old.
 Strong purposes our minds possess,
 Our hearts affections fill,
 We toil and earn, we seek and learn,
 And thou descendest still.'—CLOUGH.

THERE were no shoals in the way of James's love. His being accepted by the rich widow was a nine days' wonder in the country-side, but soon came to be treated as a matter of course, like any other acknowledged fact. Some years later I heard a story which perhaps explained it, for I never could account for it under the supposition of love having anything to do with it, at least on her side. It seemed that she had some grand relations whose favour she had forfeited by her marriage with Mr Johnson of the Cough Pills, and who would not take

any notice of her after it, but in whose esteem she hoped to be reinstated if she could get back into her former position in society; and when a gentlemanly young man of fairly good family paid her marked attention, she thought she could do no better than encourage him. I suppose that she may have liked him fairly well, and been touched by his evident devotion to her: for whatever the world might think, there was no doubt in the minds of us who knew him that James loved her for herself, and not for her money.

The wedding-day was fixed for one day in August, and oh, the preparations and the plans and the consultations as to whether this or that would be correct! It was to be a very quiet wedding; but Augusta was extremely anxious that all the details should be correct. So on account of her widowhood there were to be no bridesmaids, not even Rosalie, and her wedding dress was not to be white but the palest peach colour. Augusta had stipulated to be married at Highthorpe, so that my father might assist in performing the ceremony; Barbara Talbot and her father, and the Barons, were the only persons invited; and the only drop of comfort in the cup of

discomfort which the whole affair of the wedding had brewed for me, was the thought of becoming better acquainted with Barbara, whose father was an old college friend of my father's. They were coming to stay with us for two nights at the time of the wedding.

The wedding bells rang merrily on the morning of the 12th of August. The wedding was much like other weddings; every one remarked how well the bride looked, and how beautifully everything 'went off.' Professor Talbot gave her away; Mr Baron read all the service except actually marrying them, which my father did; and there was no crying except from Rosalie, who was carried out of church roaring in consequence of having persisted in pulling the stopper out of a bottle of salts which she had been given to hold, and half choked herself with the smell. Edith Baron had the intense pleasure of being asked to the wedding, and tasting some wedding-cake; and in the *Times* next day there was the following paragraph, 'On Wednesday, August 12, at the parish church, Highthorpe, by the Rev. John Hope, father of the bridegroom, assisted by the Rev. E. Baron,

.James Hope, Esquire, to Augusta, widow of the late E. Johnson, Esquire, and daughter of the late Charles Van, Esquire, Barrister-at-law.'

The chief amusement after the wedding was to hear how George and Barbara went on together. She was uncommonly clever, and quick at repartee: and my father and I laughed heartily at their quick sharp speeches to one another. They had met before in London, and had become pretty intimate; and the light easy tone of banter which both used was perfectly new to me, and very amusing.

I do not know whether I admired Barbara quite as much on this occasion as on the last: she left me with more idea of her cleverness, but more also of her self-esteem. The fact was, I suppose, that here was one of those characters which take much longer to ripen than most do: and like Ribston pippins in September, they taste hard and rough because they have not yet had time to mellow and sweeten. But when they have mellowed, how rich and beautiful they are! it is worth while waiting to have them in perfection.

The Talbots left us, and George also, the day after the wedding: and I entered my father's study when

they were gone, with a sense of relief at the whole affair being over. He was sitting in his accustomed chair by the window, but his face was unusually grave. 'Is that you, Cecy?' he said. 'I have long wanted to have a talk with you, my dear: but I put it off until after the wedding, because I thought you had enough on your hands just now. So sit down by me, little woman: we will not have any "Analogy" to-day; we will talk instead.'

I sat down in what had been my old accustomed place ever since my childhood—on his footstool, with my head leaning against his knee.

'I have not been feeling so well lately, Cecy.'

I looked up in sudden alarm. 'Papa, you can do much more than you could all the year after your illness.'

'More in one way, my dear, but less in another. I have had several new symptoms in the last few months, which I thought seemed serious; and when I sent for Bird he confirmed me in my opinion. So, my little woman, do you understand what follows?'

I suppose my face must have expressed some vague horror, for he bent over me and kissed me, before he

finished his speech—‘I have not much longer to be with you.’

I sat as if stunned, gazing at him with open eyes.

‘Yes,’ he went on quietly, clasping me closer with his arms, ‘I grieve only for you—all of you,—but especially my little Cecy. It would be very hard to leave you fatherless and motherless, if I were not fully sure that I left you in the care of One whose care is far better than mine. And you must not grieve for me : you must think of what it will be to me, and be glad. Cecy, my darling!’ for I still sat motionless, unable to comprehend this great trouble,—and then he turned and murmured to himself, ‘She is too young—she is but a child after all. I ought not to have told her.’

‘It can’t be true!’ I gasped at last.

‘It is true,—nay, humanly speaking, certain,’ he answered gravely. ‘Cecy, I should not have told you. It was selfish of me ; but I thought it would be such a relief to me when we both knew it, and could both look forward to it together. I kept it from you for a long time, my little girl ; I wish I had kept it from you altogether.’

‘No, papa!’ I said at last, gathering voice-to speak, ‘I am glad you told me; I would far rather know the truth. Only are you sure it is true?’ And the tears came raining down, and relieved me.

Then he went on talking: for a while he left the subject which had agitated me, talking of my mother and the old pleasant days of his married life. Every detail of those times seemed to return before his mind with redoubled vividness, now that the time was so soon coming when they would be together again.

Then when I got calmer he returned to the first subject—talking calmly and hopefully of the future—that world that he had always realized so clearly and fully, that when the time came for him to enter it it seemed to him

‘ Only a step into the open air,
Out of a tent, already luminous
With light that shines through its transparent walls.’

He would not let me write and tell George the truth. He thought it would come more gently by word of mouth the next time that George came down for a night, as he often did, coming down by the last

train from London, and returning by the first in the morning.

The first force of the shock was over, and outwardly things went on with so little difference that I could almost have said that it was all fancy. My father did not seem worse than usual ; he sat in his chair enjoying the bright September weather, and sometimes walked, with his feeble step, to the church, or to visit some sick person in one of the near cottages. I longed for a pony-carriage for him, but we were much too poor for such a luxury. One day, however, when James and Augusta had returned from their bridal tour, and were settled at Eastwood, I made bold to ask Augusta whether, some day when she was not using her pony-carriage, she would let my father have it for the afternoon.

‘ Oh, certainly, dear Cecy. I would to-day, but the coachman will not have time to clean it before we go out to dinner ; and to-morrow I shall want it, and the next day I can’t manage it either. Well, you shall certainly have it some day. I will let you know when. One day is the same to you as another, I dare say.’

Quite: but the day that my father was to have his drive in Augusta's pony-carriage never arrived. I ventured to remind her of it three or four times, knowing what an enjoyment it would be to him; but each time I was put off with a refusal couched in fair speeches; and I became aware that words and promises were as plentiful as blackberries with Augusta, but that the deeds which alone could make them of any value were not forthcoming,—at least if they were likely at all to clash with her own pleasure.

I had tried hard to follow my father's advice, and to find out the good points in Augusta's character, but it became more and more plain to me that she was a thoroughly selfish woman, whose one thought was herself, and who quietly disposed of everything which conflicted with her own interest or pleasure. I saw that George's prediction would certainly come true—that James would be the one to obey, not the one to rule. For instance—he, poor fellow, was thoroughly upset by the tidings of my father's danger, and used to walk over from Eastwood almost every day to see him; and I was the more surprised when,

on going to see Augusta one day, she remarked, 'Has James told you that we mean to leave this place in November? The lease is out then, and it is such an uncomfortable place that I would not stay in it any longer than I could help.'

'Then where will you go? Not far off, I suppose?'

'We shall go to London for the winter.'

'To London! But that is so far off from papa.'

'It would be very easy to telegraph if you wanted James—and I am sure, dear Cecy, I would come directly if your father were really ill. But there seems to me to be very little difference in him from time to time: I really think he may go on for years in the state he is in now.'

'But he will miss James so much. He quite looks forward to his coming every morning. Oh, Augusta, I wish you would stay a few months longer! You will be glad one day if you do.'

'Try and control yourself, dear Cecy: it agitates me so to see anybody cry. I assure you, your mind is overstrung; what you fear is greatly imaginary, or I would stop at once. But really I cannot pass

another winter in this dreary old house—it has such an effect upon my nerves, and it is so damp in wet weather. If it were for a real danger, I would make an effort : but really—pardon my saying so, dear—yours is only a girl's fancy.'

I made another appeal to James, after his next visit to my father. I followed him outside the hall door, where he was just going to get upon his horse. My father was not so well that morning, and I said, 'James, you are not really thinking of going away when papa is in this state ?'

'I would much sooner stay, I own, Cecy : but what can I do ? Augusta has set her heart upon not staying here another winter.'

'But surely you can make her see reason. You must know how papa would miss your coming, and how few things there are to vary his days now. You surely may have a voice in the matter.'

'I have spoken to her, and I shall speak to her again,' he said ; 'but if she still persists in refusing to stay, we must go. Besides, Cecy, she thinks that both you and he take much too serious a view of his case ; and I am not sure that she is not right.'

Clearly there was nothing to be got from James : he was completely under his wife's thumb, and indignant as I was I could only relieve my mind in a letter to George, who by this time knew the truth. He was as indignant as myself, and the next time that he came down for the Sunday we enjoyed the pleasure of speaking our minds to one another on the subject.

My father did not say much to us ; but he evidently felt James's leaving him just now. Augusta was not much loss to him : she looked in upon him about once a week, or rather seldomer, for five minutes ; filled the room with a rush of small-talk and inquiries for his health, and came in and went out with a rustling of silk, leaving behind her an odour of musk, to which my father had a great objection. One day I hinted this to her, and I observed that after that, when they drove over, she generally remarked, quite casually, just as she was going to enter the study, 'Oh, how stupid of me ! I quite forgot your hint about the musk, Cecy, and have got some upon my handkerchief ; I won't go in to-day, I think, dear ; I am so afraid of making him feel uncomfortable, and I would not do that for the

world.' I cannot say that I pressed her very much to enter the study, for her presence was rather overpowering in a sick room.

The autumn set in early that year. October was cold and dark, and St Luke's summer, brief though it usually is, was even shorter than usual: it did not last three days, and then we had low leaden skies day after day, and dripping boughs, and the ground so saturated with wet that the rain would not sink in, but stood in pools among the grass. The rivers swelled and overspread their banks: now and then, when the thick air cleared for a few hours and we could catch a glimpse of the plain below, we saw it looking almost like a lake, there were so many white sheets of water which were wont to be pasture-fields. As the leaves dropped, and all the pleasant sights and sounds which spoke of summer passed away, I felt as if the happiness of my life were going too: for I dared not let myself look forward to the future, and I instinctively knew, what I would not even avow to myself, that the dear old home of my childhood, with all its memories and associations, would not be mine much longer.

That autumn was very quiet and peaceful, however. My father failed gradually, but gently. Soon he never stirred from his chair by the fireside: he was cheerful as ever, but more silent than usual. The days went on, very like each other: George always came home from Saturday night until Monday morning, and James often accompanied him. If James only would have opened his eyes to see what lay before him! But he would not: Augusta had talked him into blindness to our father's state, and I suppose he wished to be blinded. He always checked my father, every time he spoke, as he did naturally to me and George, of the impending change: he would have it that every sign of increasing weakness, and every fresh bad symptom which we noticed, were caused by the cold, or the close heat, or the frost, or the damp; and insisted upon turning off the subject to something else. But to us—and more especially to me who was always with him—the memory of what he said in those few last months is one of the most precious possessions of my life. I do not think I could have gone through what I did in after days, without

losing heart and courage, if it had not been for his teaching and guidance.

At last the end came—suddenly, though it had been so long expected, as it often does after a long illness. George had come home to spend Christmas-day at home, and had found him looking a good deal altered within the last week: but still he was able to come down-stairs, and sit in his arm-chair by the study fire. He seemed unusually cheerful and bright that evening: he inquired into George's affairs and the working of his business, and asked me about some sick people who were under my charge, bidding me see that they had a good Christmas dinner: and then our talk passed to the deeper and higher subjects which were ever on his thoughts. At last the time came for him to go to bed, and I carried the candle to his room, and saw that everything was comfortable for him. 'Thank you, Cecy,' he said, 'I hope you and George will have a happy Christmas: it will be a quiet one, but it may not be the less happy for that. Mine will be a very happy one—very happy,' he repeated. And then as I kissed him

before leaving him, he held me pressed to him for a moment, and said, 'God bless my little girl!'

They were the last words that I heard him speak. Dawson came to me, crying bitterly, early the next morning, and told me that he had passed away in sleep. The early dawn of the Christmas morning was shining in upon his dead face; the angels' song, whose echo rings throughout Christendom on that day, was no echo to him, but a reality.

He was buried on New Year's Day—it was a soft, still, spring-like day, when the sun was shining, and the south-west wind had not yet bid us farewell: and the tender crimson of the buds on the lime-boughs, and the soft green of the springing grass, seemed to hush our grief, and tell us of a better hope. Down far below, the broad river, bright in the sunshine, crept slowly towards the faint blue line of sea: it had left the fair wooded country to the westward, and flowed down through bleak plain and bare marsh. The children played upon its banks no longer, the birds sat upon no over-arching boughs to sing to it.—

What matter, so that it reaches the sea at last?

VII.

CHOOSING A GOVERNESS.

'A face that's best
 By its own beauty drest,
 And can alone command the rest :
 Days that in spite
 Of darkness, by the light
 Of a clear mind are day all night.'—CRASHAW.

I CANNOT dwell, even now, upon the period which followed. The strain of nursing and of anxiety had told somewhat upon my health, though I had not felt it at the time : and the weeks of packing and preparations for leaving my dear old home, seemed like tearing away the fibres of my heart from everything it loved. When at last I reached Augusta's house in London, I was thoroughly done up, both in mind and body. There was nothing that I cared to do—I seemed to be homeless and useless, a sort of waif or stray in the world : and I would have given anything to be allowed to sit and dream of the past in my own room, without

being interrupted : but this Augusta would not allow, and perhaps it was well that she did not. She made me drive out with her, write notes, arrange flowers, read novels to her : if she had the misfortune of an orphan sister-in-law thrown upon her hands, at least she intended to make use of her. I was too languid and unhappy to make any objection to anything which she told me to do, even when she pronounced my white work or stocking-knitting not fit for the drawing-room, and set me to work her a chair-cover, blue convolvuluses on a crimson ground. One thing, however, I did resist with all the strength I had left, and that was the idea of going into society : and after all, as I was not yet seventeen, there was so much of reason in what I said, that I gained my point, and Augusta thought, considering all things, that I need not come out until the next year.

She employed the time, however, in endeavouring to perfect my manners before that time arrived.

‘ Much better send her to school for a year,’ said James one day ; ‘ she would turn out just like other girls then.’ I wished I could have gone to school, for I was uncomfortably conscious of being extremely

shy, and not at all like other girls: the constant feeling that what I did or said was remarked upon, was in itself enough to make me awkward. But Augusta dismissed the idea at once.

‘Where is the money to come from?’ she said; ‘the child has got none herself, and with so many calls as I have, I do not feel bound to pay a hundred pounds for her education. Besides, there are so many letters to write, and so many little things to be done, which really I have not health for, that I could not spare her. She must manage to learn manners without going to school.’

So I remained with James and Augusta in their grand house in Eaton Square—existing, rather than living,—without any care in life or object of interest, except now and then a hurried visit from George. But he was living in the City, and we at the West End; and the distance is a considerable way to a busy man, especially as George was not particularly fond of Augusta, and our interviews were very seldom tête-à-têtes, but had her for a third. But at last there came a change in this stagnant life: I would have welcomed any, but I rejoiced in this.

Rosalie had arrived at the time of life at which it was thought necessary for her to have a nursery-governess instead of a nurse. Augusta had for some time been looking out for one; she had seen several, but those whom she liked would not take her situation, and those who would have taken the situation did not suit her. She had so many necessary qualifications: the young governess must be pretty and lady-like, and content to take care of the child's clothes, and to expect very small pay—less than half of what she had given the grand nurse, who had just left her household. But then, as she told me, Mrs Horner had come straight from the Duchess of St Cuthbert's, so of course she was obliged to give her a large salary; while, for a young person who had never been out before, surely twenty pounds a year, including washing, was enough.

One day, however, after an interview with her dress-maker, she told me that she had heard of one who might be likely to suit; and that stately functionary the coachman had to demean himself to find out a little back street in the city, the name of which he either never had heard, or pretended he never had

heard—I imagine the latter, for when once his mistress had told him that he must find out where it was, he drove there without any further difficulty—without inquiring the way once. At last we arrived at the right number, and Augusta inquired whether a young person of the name of Campbell lived there; and as it appeared that she did, we were ushered upstairs into a little parlour, evidently a state room: it contained a horsehair sofa and chairs, a table covered with oil-cloth, on which were some bead-mats, wax flowers, and a family Bible, and some pictures in gilt frames, the merits of which were not easily perceptible, since both they, and the glass over the mantelpiece, were arrayed in yellow veils—to save the gilding, I suppose.

Presently there entered a middle-aged woman, in black, with a high colour, and bugles all over her cap; and behind her a young girl, so pretty and delicately coloured, that she seemed quite to brighten up the dull room. She was about the middle height, slight and graceful in figure; she had a delicate, softly flushed complexion, like the outside petals of a pale pink hyacinth; rippling fair hair, with a tinge of gold

where the ripples caught the light; and sweet, child-like, open gray eyes, which had a sort of golden reflection when you looked into them, and harmonized perfectly with the tinting of complexion and hair. She seemed very shy, but her manners were quiet and gentle; and when she spoke she had a curious little accent which I had never heard before, but which I thought very pretty: I found out afterwards that it was the peculiar accent with which the Gaelic-speaking natives of the Highlands speak English.


This little Scotch girl was the daughter of a Free Kirk minister, in one of the loneliest corners of Ross-shire. He had been a farmer's only son; his father had struggled hard to send him to school and college, that his talents might have full scope for displaying themselves. Sandy Campbell had passed through the due course of study—been ordained, and had a 'call' to the little mountain parish of Invermoran, where he laboured hard, and did his work like a man. But one year the little shooting-box at Invermoran had been let to a great English nobleman; and with him came his wife and his wife's lady's-maid,—a

pretty golden-haired English girl, daughter of the bailiff on the estate at home; petted, and perhaps a little spoilt, by her mistress, and treated rather like a companion than a servant. She came to the little white-washed church under the hill, Sunday after Sunday; and Sandy Campbell fell in love with her, and asked her to marry him. Her mistress rejoiced at the idea of her pretty little Margaret marrying so well: there was a grand marriage at the shooting-box, my lord himself gave the little bride away, and my lady gave her her marriage-portion. Then they left the place and the parish, never to return; and Sandy and Margaret lived happily at the manse for some years, and had two children during that time. Then there came a year of famine; and they worked day and night among the sick and suffering, and doled out their own means, if only they might preserve life among those whom they looked upon as their charge. And after that, when the famine was followed by fever, they still went on, and did all they could to save lives and souls. But the fever seized upon them. Margaret Campbell died first, then the eldest child; the father and little Phemie recovered. But the

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minister was never the same after that. He went about his work as usual, but the joy of his life was over; and before many years had gone by, Sandy Campbell was dead—of consumption, the doctors said,—of a broken heart, those who loved him knew. Little Phemie was left an orphan, unprovided for, and a brother of her mother's sent for her to London, and adopted her, sending her to school, and doing his best to enable her to provide for herself in after life. The little mountain girl was caught and caged; but, alas! she was not a genius, and never would be one. However, she loved little children; and when she was seventeen, though she could not pretend to take a situation as 'governess' absolute, she thought she might be equal to the task of nursery-governess—where she might teach some little child to read, and take care of her clothes. So her aunt's cousin, the dress-maker, had promised to recommend her to some of her patrons; and this was how Augusta happened to hear of the little Scotch girl who stood before us, shy and blushing, with her soft eyes cast down, and her pretty hands folded on her apron.

Things seem to come about strangely in this



world. For if Augusta had not gone to her dress-maker that day, and inquired whether she knew of any one for a nursery-governess, Phemie would never have come to us, and the whole after-course of this story would have been changed. If she could have foreseen all that was afterwards to befall her in consequence, would she still have done all that she did being blind to the future? Yes, I know she would.

But I am going on too far. I have only come to where Phemie Campbell was standing before Augusta, being inspected, and worthy Mrs Smith, strong in kindness of heart and weak in her aspirates, was putting in her word now and then. The smallness of the salary seemed to be no objection to Phemie: her aunt looked as if she would have preferred five pounds more, but Phemie looked up appealingly. 'Oh, aunt, I would be able to manage on that,' she whispered: and she seemed so eager to accept the situation, that Mrs Smith was unable to refuse her. The negotiation was settled then and there. Phemie was to come on that day fortnight, and the week after that we were all to leave London, and to go down to Redscar, a

fashionable sea-side place, where James and Augusta had taken a house for the summer.

Augusta's only doubt about her was that she was too pretty, and would give herself airs: but then, as she had often said that she would not have any one who was not nice-looking about Rosalie, it was difficult to find any one to strike the golden mean. I thought a long time about her: her beauty had interested me much, and her shy innocent look still more: it was a break in the monotony of my life. I almost envied the girl, scarcely older than myself, who was going out in the world to do some good, and earn independence for herself; and I made up my mind that I would try to make her home with us pleasanter and less lonely than it was likely otherwise to be.

On the day appointed she arrived—a childlike, shrinking little creature, dressed simply in a gray gown, black shawl, and straw bonnet with white ribbons. As Augusta was not within, I had to introduce her to her room and future pupil. She shyly declined any help, and I shut the door of the tiny room which was to be the little Scotch girl's sanctum, and went down-stairs wondering how she would get on with

her spoil charge. I went into the school-room before going down to dinner ; the child was already sitting on her knee, chattering more freely and in a more childlike way than I had ever seen her do before. Miss Campbell certainly had an intuitive knowledge of the way to manage children ; perhaps the secret of it was that she heartily loved them.

‘ Have you seen Miss Campbell, Cecy ? ’ inquired Augusta that evening, as she reclined, fan in hand, upon a luxurious crimson-covered sofa after dinner, having left James to consume his wine in solitude.

‘ Yes ; she seems getting on nicely with Rosalie.’

‘ It is a very responsible thing choosing a governess,’ she remarked. I assented.

‘ I am not quite at ease about her looks,’ she went on, ‘ but it is difficult to know what to do. I would not have an ugly or ungraceful person about Rosalie for anything ; but then those pretty ones are so apt to give themselves airs, and fancy people are making love to them. I wish one could engage governesses as one does servants—no followers allowed.’

‘ I think it would be very hard upon them,’ I said. ‘ Even as to servants, I always think it is

treating them like slaves to allow them no chance of marrying ; and governesses seem to get very few chances as it is.'

' Ah, you are young at present, Cecy, you see. When you get older, you will say that my views are the best. Well, as I was saying, I hope we shall find that this young person will answer ; but I am more than half afraid about her looks.'

The next day Augusta was engaged in the afternoon : I knocked at the school-room door, and found teacher and pupil happily looking over pictures together, in a scrap-book which Rosalie had long ago discarded as being old and ugly.

' Are you going out with Rosalie this afternoon, Miss Campbell ? ' I said.

' Yes,' she answered, the colour deepening in her cheeks, as it usually did when any one spoke to her ; ' we were going to walk in the Park.'

' Then may I come too ? '

She opened her eyes wide, astonished at my asking her permission. ' Oh, please—if you like,' she faltered out ; and before long we were walking in the Park together, Rosalie holding her governess's hand.

‘You have not lived in London all your life, I suppose,’ I said, for I was ignorant of Phemie’s history, beyond the fact that she was of Scottish birth.

‘Oh no! I lived up in the Highlands till I was fourteen.’

‘Was it pretty?’

‘Oh, it was such a dear, beautiful place! I have never seen any place like Invermoran—how I would like to go back there!’ she said softly under her breath.

‘Tell me what it was like.’

‘I don’t know whether I can, but I will try. It is on a loch that runs up into the mountains; there are no trees, except here and there where it is very sheltered; scarcely anything grows there but heather and coarse grass. But it is the mountains themselves that are so beautiful; they rise up in all sorts of strange shapes, particularly when you look out towards Kinlochmoran forest—’

‘But I thought you said there were no trees.’

‘This is a deer-forest,’ said Phemie, evidently

thinking that she had explained sufficiently; but I was not much the wiser, and had to be informed that a Highland forest seldom possessed a tree within its boundaries, but meant the part of the mountains where the deer fed.

‘Then you are quite a mountaineer?’

‘Maggie and I used to climb anywhere; we knew our way about all the mountains near us; I don’t think we could have got lost if we had tried. We were so happy together—I never knew there was such a thing as trouble in the world till the fever came, and mother and Maggie died.’

The soft eyes were cast down, and a grave expression overcast the bright face. ‘Tell me what you used to do,’ I said.

‘There seems nothing to tell, when you think of it,’ she said; ‘it was only that we were so very happy. Father used to teach us our lessons in the morning, and in the afternoon we used to help mother in the house, or at needle-work; and in the evening we used to go and climb about the hills, or sometimes father would take us for a row on the loch, or we

went to see some poor sick people with him. But that was all ended when mother and Maggie died, and father and I were the only ones left.'

'But you went on living at Invermorran?'

'Yes; but then it was all changed. Father never got quite over the fever, and I had to keep house for him, and do all I could to make him comfortable.'

My heart opened out towards the little maiden, there seemed to be so much likeness in our past history.

'I used to wish,' she went on, 'that Maggie had been spared instead of me, for she was older than me, and such a bright, clever, bonnie lassie! And I was the youngest and the most useless, and I would have been the least missed—and yet mother and Maggie were taken and I got well.'

'Then how long ago did you come to London?'

'Three years ago. Father died in the spring, and uncle Smith came and brought me here, and sent me to school. He hoped I would learn to be a governess—a real governess, I mean, able to teach older children and get more money. But I am so stupid—I always was. Maggie used to be so clever at her

lessons; she would have done credit to the school, and uncle Smith, and all; but I never could learn, though I did try all I could.'

'I hope you will like being here,' I said in rather a doubtful tone, after a little pause.

'I am sure I will, if everybody is as kind as you,' she said, clasping my hand in both hers, in such a child-like, pretty way, that I felt as if it would be impossible to be unkind to her. 'I wanted to get a situation for such a long time,' she said, 'and I thought I was so stupid nobody would take me; and I did not like to be a burden on uncle and aunt Smith. Besides, nobody ever has been unkind to me, and I don't see why they would be. Of course I don't want or expect to be noticed; I shall be very happy if they will only leave me alone.'

'It is a good thing that we are going to leave London,' I said. 'It will be very pleasant at Redscar, I hope, at least much pleasanter than here. Don't you dislike London very much?'

'No!' she said, considering—'I don't think I dislike it very much. Of course, as a place to live in, I would sooner be in my own dear Invermoran—

though that would not be the same to me now as it was then. But uncle and aunt Smith have been very kind to me, and the girls at school liked me, and I have found plenty of people to love, even here.'

After all it is the heart that makes its own home.

Phemie Campbell was not one of those persons who seem very attractive at first but whom one wearies of as time passes on. I grew to like her more and more, and became apt to spend what time was at my own disposal in her company. Sometimes I tried to analyze the charm which she had for me, though without much success. She was good, pretty, simple-minded, and naturally refined; but her special attractiveness for me lay in something about her no more to be defined than the odour of violets; and this attractiveness she never lost all her life.

'Cecy,' Augusta said to me the day before we were to leave London, 'I am afraid you will get too intimate with that Miss Campbell. You will make her presume upon her position, and we shall have to part with her; and Rosalie seems to like her so, I would much sooner remain as we are.'

'I don't think you need be afraid of her presuming

upon her position,' I said. 'She seems extremely quiet and retiring; she blushes up to her ears even if you or James speak to her.'

'Yes,' answered Augusta, 'I have noticed that foolish trick of blushing that she has: it has annoyed me very much. I only hope Rosalie will not catch it. But I did not mean to say that Miss Campbell's manners seemed at all forward at present: we shall be more likely to see what she is when George is staying with us, or gentlemen are in the way: you can never trust those sort of people, they are so designing.'

'I think you may trust her,' I answered as quietly as I could, restraining the indignation that came over me, and made my very face burn. If Phemie Campbell, at least, were designing, I never would trust my own judgment of any one again. How could Augusta, thinking such things as she did, dream of keeping the little Scotch girl in her house, more especially as governess to her child?

Appearances may be deceitful, but surely groundless suspicion is more deceitful still.

VIII.

PHEMIE CAMPBELL.

'How happy is he born and taught
Who serveth not another's will ;
Whose armour is his honest thought,
And simple truth his utmost skill.

SIR H. WOTTON.

WE went to Redscar. It was a mushroom watering-place, prettily situated, but too fashionable for my taste,—unless you left the beach and parade altogether, and climbed up the steep green downs that backed it, and sheltered it from the north winds. But such was not often my fate, at least during the first month of our stay. Augusta walked up and down the parade and the pier, dressed in the most correct seaside costume ; and if James were not at hand, insisted upon my accompanying her. I found out soon that Augusta's reason for deciding on coming to Redscar, rather than any other place, was the fact that her relations, the Vanes, whom she had

so direfully offended by her first marriage, had a house close by, and she hoped by some means to be able to work herself back into their good graces. She called, and left a card, almost as soon as we arrived ; but no notice was taken, and after some time she began to feel rather uneasy as to whether they meant to notice her or not. However, she did her best : she got herself introduced to some people who were intimate with her cousin and his wife, and invited them to a most select little dinner. ‘ Cecy,’ she said that morning, ‘ just see that Miss Campbell dresses tidily this evening : she must come down to see after Rosalie ; for the Percys are very particular people, and Rosalie behaved so very ill the last time any one dined with us.’

‘ Now then, Phemie,’ I said, entering the room where she was dressing, carrying in my hands a spray of blue flowers for the hair—a present which George had given me during the last year,—‘ sit down and let me put this in your hair. It will just suit you.’

She turned quickly round—all her long golden hair rippling down, far below her waist—‘ Oh, Miss Hope, what is that for ? not for my hair ?’

‘Not if you call me Miss Hope.’

‘But Mrs Hope would not like to hear me call you Cecy,’ she answered, ‘and it would be like putting myself out of my place.’

‘Well, if it goes against your conscience to call me so before her, don’t; but when we are alone I must be Cecy to you, as you are Phemie to me.’

‘I must if you say so,’ she said; ‘but suppose I called you Cecy some day before people by mistake—what would I do?’

‘Say it was my fault, I suppose: and now look at this flower’—and I laid a blossom against her hair. The pale gold looked exquisite against the blue of the flower.

‘It is very pretty,’ she said doubtfully.

‘Sit down, then, and let me put it in your hair.’

‘Please not, Cecy. It is very pretty, and very kind of you to think of it, but I ought not.’

‘Why not? My sister particularly told me to see that you were nicely dressed.’

‘I must not, indeed. My father always told us it was wrong to wear artificial flowers; and I never have worn any.’

‘But why should it be wrong? Every one wears them—the best people that I know do.’

‘I don’t mean to say that it is wrong for everybody; but I am sure it would be wrong for me.’

On this point there was no shaking her. Phemie Campbell, yielding and childlike though she was in most things, was quite immovable when a question of right and wrong, or what was such to her, was at stake. In one thing, however, she was very different from other people that I have met, who, equally conscientious with herself, made the minutiae of life—things in themselves indifferent—into questions of right and wrong as she did. While their minds were occupied with incessant conflicts of duty and inclination about these little things, until sometimes they seemed to become morbid and unable to attend to the greater duties of life—Phemie seemed to have no trouble upon the subject. She was thoroughly single-minded: once certain that a course was right, she seemed to have neither wish nor inclination to follow any other, however tempting it might be.

So when Rosalie went down to dessert, Phemie and I took up our abode in the drawing-room: she

wore a simple high white dress, and her only ornaments were the abundant coils of her rare golden braids. 'You have much gold upon your head,' I said to her, in the words of the little elf in 'Goblin Market.'

'Please, Cecy,' she said, as she saw me take up a book, 'would you tell me something?'

'Anything you like.'

'May one work in company, or is it not good manners? Aunt Smith never did, but I see people do things here which she would have thought very odd, so I suppose there are different rules for ladies and tradespeople.'

'My dear, who is that pretty girl?' said Mrs Percy aside to me when the ladies entered. 'Is she a sister of yours?' And when I had explained who she was, I asked if I might introduce her; and kind old Mrs Percy sat and talked to her for some time. By-and-by, however, Mrs Percy moved away; and then Augusta came up to her, and said, 'It is Rosalie's bed-time, Miss Campbell. It will be hardly worth while for you to come down again,' she added in a

lower tone: and Phemie quietly left the room with her charge.

She did not return, and Mrs Percy said presently, ‘Your little governess is quite an ornament to the room, Mrs Hope. It is quite a pleasure to look at her; I hope she is coming down again.’

‘The fact is,’ said Augusta, ‘I am afraid of turning the girl’s head by taking any notice of her. Girls so easily get an idea that they are pretty.’

‘Oh, nonsense, my dear,’ said the quick old lady; ‘she is as quiet and modest as possible: and it does a girl good to see something of what goes on outside the school-room door.’

Every wish of Mrs Percy’s was law to Augusta this evening; for was it not through her that she hoped again to be admitted into the paradise from which she was excluded—the society of Sir Theophilus and Lady Eleanor Vane? ‘If you think so, Mrs Percy, I am sure she shall come down,’ she said, and sent me up to the school-room in search of her.

It was summer twilight; the sun had set, but it

was not yet dark, and Phemie sat on the window-seat in the school-room, her chin resting on her hand, the light of the 'after-glow' shining upon her hair. She was looking out at the deepening blue expanse of sea, and the paler, brighter one of sky, where two or three stars were just beginning to appear. She was murmuring over an old Scottish hymn to herself—

'Thy walls are made of precious stones,
Thy bulwarks diamonds square ;
Thy gates are of right orient pearl,
Exceeding rich and rare.
Thy turrets and thy pinnacles
With carbuncles do shine ;
Thy very streets are paved with gold,
Surpassing clear and fine.'

'There is a broken piece of the pavement,' she said with a smile, pointing overhead to a detached golden cloud that was slowly sailing by. 'Cecy, I have had such a pleasant time up here. This is the sort of evening that makes me think of father and mother and Maggie : and the sea and sky are so beautiful !'

'And now I have got to disturb you, and bring you down,' I said regretfully. 'I am very sorry, Phemie.'

‘Never mind,’ she said; ‘I would sooner stop up here: but I dare say I have had quite as much thinking as is good for me. I sometimes think, if we could be always dreaming about Heaven, and those we love there, we would not be content to stay here, so it is a good thing we have other things to do.’

I could not say that my feelings were the same. I was of a practical turn of mind, and there was more danger of my being diverted from the ‘things eternal’ by the pressure of the ‘things temporal,’ than the reverse.

We went down, and when the gentlemen came in, I was called upon to take the second in a glee. I acquitted myself to Mrs Percy’s satisfaction—she was playing our accompaniment,—and she said to James, ‘Your sister has got what promises to be a very fine voice; you should give her the advantage of some good lessons. There is a very good master here, a German, named Winter.’

I was delighted at the idea of having singing-lessons; I loved singing beyond anything,—in fact, it was the one accomplishment for which I had a talent,—and Mrs Percy was, as I well knew, an

authority upon such matters. I must confess that Phemie sank a little in my estimation when she avowed that she did not care for music : and it appeared that she had not distinguished the 'Chough and Crow' from 'The Hardy Norseman.'

So ended this evening. As we went up-stairs, Augusta stopped me, and said, 'Another time, Cecy, remember not to introduce Miss Campbell to any one: it is not the thing to introduce a governess. Really, you do take so much notice of that girl, that I know the end will be that she will give herself airs, and we shall have to part with her.'

'I don't think you will, Augusta,' I replied.

George came down to Redscar to spend his summer holidays, and his arrival was the signal for a succession of boating expeditions, picnics, scrambles, and all sort of seaside pleasures. Sometimes Rosalie insisted on joining these parties, and in that case Phemie went to take care of her; but she was more often left at home. I tried to make George say that he admired Phemie, but he did not. 'She's pretty enough,' he said, 'but she has not a spark of intellect in her face: she always looks just the same. I dare

say she is a good meek little thing, but I like a girl who can say boo to a goose.'

Intellect certainly was not Phemie's strong point. She had good common sense, and was excellent in practical management, but she was instantly at sea in an argument, and had no love for reading. Her religious opinions had been formed, by the teaching of her father, in a strongly Presbyterian mould; and I, who in those days was rather controversially inclined, and—not an unusual case at seventeen—thought it my duty to make my friends agree with my views, tried to argue with her about what I looked upon as her errors. But you might as well argue with the sea as with Phemie. If I read to her a passage in a book, or a sermon, which was intended to disprove her views, I found that she thought it all very nice, and had not the least notion that it was advocating ideas opposite to her own. One day I tried to convert her from her errors by reading to her a carefully selected sermon of Dr Newman's. Her only remark when I had finished was, 'Thank you, Cecy, I like it very much: what a good man he must be!' Hers was not at all a combative mind: at first I thought that

her quiet acceptance and assimilation of all sorts of theology showed only want of understanding, but gradually I came to learn that it sprang from a far deeper source—so strong and firm a realization of the great truths which all held in common, that the slighter differences which divide one from another were almost imperceptible to her. One tenet, indeed, she held very near her heart, in love for her father's memory, and that was the superiority of the Free Kirk to its Established rival. However, I knew far too little to be able either to contradict or to agree with her on that point.

One Sunday evening I was sitting on a quiet part of the beach, musing. George had returned to his work in London; James was asleep in his arm-chair, and Augusta on her sofa, and Phemie's ideas of Sunday were very strict: she would not read any book except her Bible, nor walk anywhere except to and from church. It was not late, though we had finished dinner some little while; these long summer evenings by the sea gave one so much daylight.

A man's footfall, tramping on the shingle, roused me. I turned round: and there stood—to

my great astonishment—my cousin Charles, who I had thought was on the other side of the Atlantic. He recognized me sooner than I him: for he had grown a thick brown beard, and had broadened and bronzed in his out-of-door life. ‘Why, Cecy!’ he said: and with the sound of his voice I knew him at once. He took my two hands in his and looked at me.

‘Why, Cecy!’ he said again, ‘you are hardly grown any bigger or taller since I left you. How are you, and how are they all?’

‘Very well,’ I answered: ‘but how did you come here, Charley? We thought you were in Canada.’

‘It is dangerous to think anything,’ he said. ‘Ah, Cecy,’ he added more gravely, ‘I did not think that when I came back to England I should find the dear old Highbury home broken up, and you scattered over the face of the earth. I made George give me your address; but I stupidly lost it; the Post-office was shut up, and I have been church-going nearly all day in hopes of seeing you.’

‘But how did you come back, and why?’

‘Why,—this is how. My uncle has relented, you must know, to begin with.’

‘Did he actually send for you to come back to him?’

‘Yes: I got a very kind letter from him, saying that he had tried to put me out of his thoughts after I had left him; but, somehow, he found he could not; and he had come to think that perhaps he had been in the wrong in insisting upon my breaking with my father’s family. So he said that he had made a will leaving me his heir, without conditions; but that I must come back to him immediately, for he wanted to see me again before he died. So I came off by the next boat, and when I got to London found that he had had an attack of paralysis, and knew no one. They say he cannot last very long, and they doubt there being any chance of his recovering his senses.’

‘Poor old man.’

‘It is very sad; for I should have liked to have seen him, and made it up with him personally. Of course, his having written that letter shows that he had forgiven me; but now, somehow, I can’t help reproaching myself with not having made the first move. I might have written to him,—of course, saying that I did not expect anything from him, and

depended entirely on my own exertions—but showing that I did not bear malice. But one is so apt not to see the rights of a case till it is too late.’

I assented, thinking of what had often been my own experience; and I asked what his plans were.

‘Of course I must stay here for the present. It is not worth while for me to go back to Canada and then over here again, perhaps in a month, as I must do if my uncle died; and what I do then must depend entirely on circumstances—how the will stands, and so on. But if I can, I shall certainly go back to America.’

‘You like the life, then?’

‘I like the life very much indeed. You must not fancy that I have been making my fortune all this time, though I have just managed to get along, and pay my way, but I have not filled my pockets. It is a splendid country, but is getting too civilized for a man without capital. If I had some money to lay out, it would be different: I don’t know what I might not do.’ And he went on talking about his work and his course of life, until we reached home; and James being awoke up from his Sunday even-

ing's nap, was fully as surprised at the sight of Charley as I had been.

There was so much to do and to hear that that evening passed very quickly. Augusta seemed prepossessed with Charley's appearance, and made herself agreeable, as she could when she chose. They both pressed him to stay and sleep, but he refused, alleging as a reason, that his things were at the inn, and promised to come down and stay with us at another time, since he now had business affairs to settle in London.

All this time I had not been able to tell him what I knew he was longing to hear—the details of my father's last days at Highthorpe. He was exactly the same genial, pleasant, happy-tempered fellow as ever. He had lost none of his interest in home affairs; and while he seemed unaltered, I had 'grown up to him: I had been almost a child when he left us, and now I was a woman—for trouble and responsibility had made me in many respects older than my years. Still, I liked to feel the brotherly consideration and protection with which he had always treated me, and which was unaltered in his manner to me.

‘He will be a person of some consideration,’ Augusta remarked one day when he was gone. ‘That old uncle of his was always reputed to be a rich man; and if he is really to be his heir, he will be well able to buy some nice estate, and settle down into a country gentleman. He is well connected, too; his mother was related to the Raymonds of Blackmore, James told me. The Vanes used to visit there, I know;’ and she sighed, as she always did when she thought of that lost paradise, the society of her aristocratic cousins.

‘I don’t think Charley would be happy settled down in England,’ I said. ‘He likes the freedom of his colonial life too well, and he takes such an interest in it. Though he has had so little money all this while, he has managed to start a school for the children of the settlers near, who are growing up without any education—I got it out of him yesterday.’

‘Built a school, do you say? He must have had next to nothing to build it with.’

‘He could not give much in money, of course: but all the trouble was his. He went round to those who could afford it, and got them to promise what

help they could : here some timber, and there some stone, and other people sent their men to do a day's work at it. Charley worked at it himself as hard as any, besides having all the trouble and risk of the undertaking; and the end was, that they got the school built, and started it, and a clergyman comes over once a fortnight to give them a service there on Sunday evening.'

'It is very much to his credit, I am sure,' said Augusta: 'but I think that when he comes into his fortune, he will never be so foolish as to go and bury himself in the backwoods.'

'I believe he will,' I said.

'We shall see,' replied Augusta. 'At least, it will be very unlike his apparent good sense if he does. But then, dear Cecy, you are but young, you see, and you look upon things as a girl does, without the aid of experience.'

How tired I was by this time of hearing about my youthfulness and want of experience from Augusta!

Charles came down to Redscar, making that place his head-quarters during the month that fol-

lowed. George, too, came down as often as he could from Saturday to Monday, as he used to do at Highthorpe. I enjoyed the company of my cousin without any drawback, until one day when there had been some question about my accompanying him and George on some long expedition. I wished to go very much : but when the day came, Phemie had a bad headache, and I did not feel myself justified in leaving her alone with Rosalie the whole afternoon, although she tried to persuade me to follow my original plan. But I knew by experience that I must not confide my real reason for staying at home to Augusta, or it would be the worse for poor innocent little Phemie. So I withstood all requests—and Augusta's above all were especially urgent—and got off the expedition on the plea of having things to do at home.

Augusta began to take me to task the moment they were gone. 'How perverse you are, Cecy!' she said, fretfully. 'I am sure, after this, you can have no excuse for saying that it is my fault if you do not get off soon.'

'What *do* you mean, Augusta?' I said, while

the meaning of her words rushed into my mind and the colour into my cheeks.

‘How childish you are, Cecy! I mean that I have given you every chance of being with Charles Hope ever since he began to pay you attention—and a remarkably good thing it would be for a penniless girl like you to be married so soon, especially to a man of his expectations—and you will not forward my views in the least.’

My face was in a flame; I scarcely knew where to look, or what to say. And yet the idea was so very pleasant, that the man whom of all men I looked upon as most a hero would be thinking of me. I cannot say that I had not fancied the same thing once or twice: but I had always put it from my thoughts as presumptuous and impossible. But now it had been noticed by others—could it be that it was likely to be true?

Augusta went on, ‘It is so absurd of you. It is not as if you disliked him, for you do not. You behave just as if you were an heiress, and it did not signify who you married; while you are really dependent on us for your food and lodging. You are

never likely to have such a chance again : and I think it is only fair to us that you should make use of your opportunities when you have them ; I give you every chance I can.'

Oh, how hot and indignant I felt when I reached my own little room after this lecture of Augusta's ! I felt as if I could never look at Charles again : and the idea at which she had hinted—that I was penniless and that he was rich—came over me with exactly the opposite effect to that which she had hoped to produce by it. How could I ever dream of marrying a man of whom people could say, 'What a catch for her !' And then the fact of which she had spoken,—that I was dependent upon her,—and the tone with which she had said it, as if she grudged me what I cost her,—grated upon my feelings as nothing that she had said to me before had ever done. I cried until I had made my eyes so red that I did not like any one to see me ; and that evening, when Charles came back, I was too shy to speak to him. It was childish under the circumstances, certainly ; but I was only seventeen.

He seemed puzzled at first by my change of manner ; but presently he moved away, looking rather

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hurt; and when I saw that, I would have given anything to have behaved naturally. But Augusta's speech had taken away all my power of behaving naturally, and when I bid him good night, he said in a low tone which only I could hear, 'What have I done to you, Cecy? What has happened?' I said, 'Nothing,' and snatched away my hand which he was holding, hastening up-stairs as fast as I could.

When I got up to my own room, I threw myself upon my bed and sobbed as if my heart would break.

IX.

HAPPY LOVE.

'With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls :
 For stony limits cannot keep love out,
 And what love can do that dares love attempt.'

ROMEO AND JULIET.

CHARLES had gone up to London on business, as he often had to do just at this time ; he was to return on the Thursday, and I dreaded his return, and yet wished for it in the bottom of my heart.

On the Thursday morning Augusta went out with Rosalie for a walk on the Parade, and returned, having purchased an enormous glass tub which was to form an aquarium. Rosalie had taken a fancy to one, and she seldom had a fancy which was not indulged. But Augusta refused to incur the extra expense necessary to stock the aquarium ; and she said that that afternoon, as it was a fine breezy day,

Rosalie, Phemie, and I could make an expedition to a little bay about a mile off, where sea-anemones and sea-weeds were said to be plentiful.

I acceded readily; the more so as it put off for an hour or two the possibility of meeting Charles, of which I was beginning to have a nervous dread. We set out after luncheon; but before we had got to the place, Rosalie said she was tired, and refused to go on. This involved Phemie's returning; and I took my way alone, calling out before I lost Phemie from view, 'Don't expect me till you see me.'

It was a delicious day, and my spirits rose under the influence of the bright sun, the soft sky, and the fresh invigorating salt breeze. I went over the short dry grass on the cliff-top—down a steep path, that went zigzagging down the cliff, and I was in the bay which was the object of my walk. But I did not find much there, and went exploring round the jutting crag which closed it in. It was rather low tide; and high water, I knew, was not for several hours; so it was without any thought of danger that I rounded the corner, and entered the second little bay, which was considerably smaller than the first, and which was

girdled in by steeper cliffs, without any way of ascent or descent.

Half way between the sea and the cliffs, when I entered the bay, a belt of dark sea-weed had been thrown by the last tide, showing how far it had reached. 'Come,' I said to myself, 'there is plenty of time; the sea will not nearly have reached that point in an hour, and I shall have ample time for collecting the creatures.' Plenty of creatures, certainly, there were in the rock-pools; and I suppose that I became so absorbed in my occupation that I forgot the lapse of time; for when I next looked at my watch I found that I had been there an hour and a half, and on looking up, I saw the waves breaking heavily against the point which I had to round.

'How very provoking!' I said to myself; 'I must have forgotten the exact hour for high-tide. I fully thought it was at seven, and from the time the waves have taken to cover that piece, it must be at five or half-past. I shall not get home till eight; for I can't climb the cliffs, and so I must do the best I can till then.' And I thought how they would all laugh at

me when they heard that I had been tide-locked in this secluded bay.

I went on collecting the pretty little corallines and zoophytes, happily enough, except for the thought of the scolding I should get from Augusta when I returned. By-and-by I sat down to admire and arrange my treasures: the waves had nearly reached the belt of seaweed which marked the limits of the last tide. Now one wave touched it, and shook it. 'What a good thing!' I thought, 'the tide will turn now.' Then another followed, and moved it an inch from its place. I sat still, watching to see it turn, and curious to know whether the seaweed would still remain in its place, or be carried back by the ebb into the sea.

I watched and watched, and the tide never turned. Swiftly and steadily the waves advanced, and I had to move my place and go further back into the shadow of the cliffs. A chill terror struck my mind: had I not heard some one say that there would be a spring-tide this week? and could this be the day? And I looked at the cliff-wall behind me; and on high ledges, some feet above my head, I saw a fringe of

dry seaweed hanging. Then the sea *did* sometimes reach as far as that.

I paced the narrow strip which the waves had left me, endeavouring to find some means of escape. The cliff was much too precipitous for me to attempt to climb: and at the top, as I knew well, there was no path, only a long reach of wild down. I tried to climb; but each effort only resulted in my slipping down, together with some fragments of the red crumbling sandstone of which the cliff was composed. At last, weary with my efforts, and trembling with awe and terror, I lay down on the shingle, and watched the waves coming nearer and nearer to me. The sun had sunk into a mantle of gray cloud, the waves were dim, and had lost their brightness, the wind was beginning to blow fresh and cold; and still that relentless sea kept on its ceaseless heavy clang, and each wave seemed to be blotting out an inch of my life.

I had often wondered what I should feel if my life were in sudden danger: but the reality was very unlike the dream. I felt half paralyzed at first, hardly able to think or to collect my thoughts; the last

speech I had made to Phemie,—‘Don’t expect me till you see me,’ ran in my head till it seemed to have no sense in its words, as the most familiar sentences sometimes do. Then I thought of Charles, and wondered whether he really loved me, and whether he would be sorry when I died; and I thought of Phemie, and George, and James; and I thought of Augusta, and wondered whether I was in charity with her. But it was all in a dreamy, half-conscious sort of way: and when I felt the touch of something cold, and found that the water had reached me, as I rose to move out of the way, I found myself dimly wondering whether it was worth while, since before long the water would reach me again, and I could not escape. Then I stood on a low rock, leaning against the cliff, and still watched the steady advance of the waves; and all at once I heard a cry from above, ‘Cecy! are you down there?’

It was Charles’s voice, and it roused my stunned energies. I answered his cry, and I saw him almost immediately begin to descend the cliff. ‘Don’t come!’ I shouted as loud as I could: but he only answered, as he swung himself down, slipping from

one projection to another as the cliff crumbled with him, 'I can't stop myself now:' and in a moment he was down by my side. I began to cry: somehow I felt as if I must be safe when he was there, and the reaction from the previous horror told upon me.

'Cecy, you must not cry,' he said; 'we are in a nice predicament down here, certainly, but there is no real danger, since if the worst came to the worst, I could swim with you round that point. Luckily it will be high-water before long, so I hope we shall escape with nothing worse than a wetting. Well, never in my life did I see such impracticable-looking cliffs.'

'How long is it before high-water?' I asked.

'Exactly twenty minutes—and here is the water at our feet. Upon my word, Cecy, I think we shall have to swim for it. Or stop—you don't mind wetting your feet? Collect all the biggest stones you can see, and I will do the same; and that will make a heap for you to stand on. What a blessing it is that the wind does not set into the bay!' he added, looking up and catching sight of the fringe of seaweed which I had seen before.

We set to work, and presently raised a considerable heap of stones which he set me upon : but the water still kept coming further and further up, and now it was over my ankles. Charles kept on looking at his watch and then at the water rather doubtfully for some time : he looked grave and anxious.

‘You are very cold, Cecy, I am afraid.’

‘I don’t mind it, thank you.’

This was all that passed between us. The water rose till it was up to my waist : Charles put his arm round me, to keep me steady on my feet, for there was considerable force in the waves, and they swayed me backwards and forwards. We did not speak, until Charles said, still holding his watch in his hand, ‘The tide has turned, Cecy. We are safe. Thank God!’

From his tone I saw that he had felt more alarm than he showed : and he went on, ‘I was in an awful state of mind for fear that I might have mistaken the time of high-tide, and it might be later than I thought. It would have been no joke to swim round that point through those breakers. But we are safe now!’

‘If it had not been for you, Charley,’—I was beginning when he stopped me.

‘When we get on dry land will be time enough to talk of that. But, Cecy, I must ask you one thing, though perhaps it is a bad opportunity for talking, in two feet or more of water—how had I affronted you on Tuesday night?’

‘You had not affronted me,’—at last I stammered out.

‘Then what on earth had happened to you?’

‘Please don’t ask. I can’t tell you,’ was all I could say.

‘Then you won’t snub me again? Come, promise?’

I did promise, not being able to refuse anything to him, especially under the present circumstances: and by-and-by the tide dropped, and left us enough space to walk up and down by way of warming our chilled limbs. But I felt that I must have seemed very cold and ungracious, since I had never thanked Charles for all the trouble he had taken, and the danger he had encountered on my behalf: and I was just beginning to falter out some expression of

my feelings, when he said, 'Cecy, I thought you knew better. I came to see after you quite as much in the thought of my own comfort as for yours. Yes, I must come out with it, and take my chance. Life would not be worth the having without you.'

Then it was true! I need not write down what he said to me; but I believe that with both of us the cold, and the wet, and the dull gray evening were entirely forgotten in the happiness that followed. In fact, I do not know what time had passed when we saw a boat rounding the corner, in which was James come out to look for us; they had at last grown uneasy at our prolonged absence, and had come to see if they could find any traces of us. I was helped into the boat, and sat in the stern, well wrapped up in the boatman's coat; and Charley took an oar to row us home, in order to warm himself. I was too cold to say much, and I do not think I uttered a word until I was in my own room, with a new-lit fire giving light and promising heat, and Phemie flitting about me, taking off my wet things, and busying herself for my comfort.

'How happy you look, Cecy!' she said, as she

ensconced me in an easy-chair by the fire, and set herself down at my feet. 'What has happened to you? I would not have thought it was so pleasant to get drenched and wetted through and through.' Tell me what you were thinking of.'

And I burst into happy tears and whispered my secret to her. She put her arms round me and kissed me again and again. 'I am so glad, darling,' she murmured, 'so very glad. I like him very much: I think he will make you a good husband: and I am sure he is a good man, which matters more than all.'

And after we had discussed this great and wonderful change in my prospects, and had both agreed that no one could have dreamed of anything so happy—and had then sat silently musing for a little while—Phemie inquired about my adventures in the bay, which seemed to me, oh, so long ago! She told me that she had been on the beach, opposite the house, with Rosalie, when Charles had come back from the station; and seeing her, he inquired where I was. She told him where she had left me; and he said, 'I hope she knows that it is a spring tide, and

those bays are sometimes perfectly full of water.' Phemie said that she did not think I did know, and he started off immediately to look for me—only just in time; for without his help, and the heap of stones he had piled for me to stand on, to raise me above the water, I should probably have been unable to resist the waves; and, having lost consciousness, I should have been washed out to sea. I could not help shuddering, even now, as I recalled the horror of 'the cruel crawling foam, the cruel hungry foam,' coming nearer and nearer, without any hope of escape. Phemie listened gravely and attentively while I spoke; then she said in her soft quiet voice, 'You have been near death to-day, Cecy; how thankful we all ought to be!'

'I ought,' I said; 'for I am not only alive, but happier than I have ever been before. O Phemie, I will try to be so good after this! and I will make Charley such a good wife!'

'Please God you will,' Phemie answered reverently.

Augusta came in in the course of half an hour. It was a most unprecedented thing for her to ascend

the extra flight of stairs which led to my bed-room ; and only some very remarkable occurrence could have produced such an effect. ‘ Oh, dear Cecy,’ she said, ‘ I am so pleased to hear from Charles about your prospects : I am so glad you have been a sensible girl after all. He tells me that he believes his uncle will leave him a clear three thousand a year : and you are a very lucky girl, let me tell you—and James thinks the same. And only seventeen, too !’

The tone of Augusta’s congratulations rather jarred upon me ; but in my present mood even she partook of the rosy light in which everything appeared ; and I kissed her more warmly than perhaps I had ever done before.

‘ He is very anxious about you, and wants to know whether you have not taken cold,’ she went on. ‘ Are you coming down to-night ?’

I rose from my chair in obedience, but my stiff limbs refused to carry me, and I began to feel the effects of all the fatigue and excitement I had gone through. I staggered, grew giddy, and nearly fell ; and it was agreed on all hands that bed was the best place for me. Unromantic as it may be, I am bound

to confess that I did not lie awake half the night thinking of Charley; but can remember very little more until the next morning, when I awoke very stiff, very tired, but in no other way the worse for my yesterday's adventure.

I found myself a heroine; the interest thrown around me by my engagement quite took away any desire to scold me for my carelessness. Augusta insisted upon making it as public as possible; Charley did not much care whether she did or not, until he found everybody congratulating him; James was highly delighted; and George came down from London late one evening to wish me joy in person.

'Upon my word, Cecy, you are a lucky girl,' he said. 'I never saw a fellow I would sooner have for a brother-in-law than old Charley. Only, you know, I won't have him taking you out to the back-woods, as he talks about doing.'

'But perhaps I shall choose to go.'

'Then you shall not marry him.'

Charley spoke to me about his future projects. 'It is all very well talking as your sister-in-law does, Cecy, about a good position in society, and plenty to

do in England, and so on ; but that sort of thing does not tempt me at all. I've a great idea that one ought to do what one can do best ; and I am sure that I can do much better as a settler than a small country squire. If the money I am to come into were a landed estate, of course it would be different ; but it is no such thing. This country is over-peopled already ; and I would much rather help to carry civilization a little further, and make more of the world habitable, than sit down and fold my hands, and farm and shoot, and give a few poor people coals and blankets. It is all very well when one is born to it ; but it would not satisfy me.'

I told him that whatever life he chose would be pleasant to me ; and I began to catch a little of his emigrating enthusiasm, and to delight in the anticipation of sharing his labours. The two persons whom I greatly regretted leaving were my brother George and Phemie Campbell ; and I used to try to draw the latter into castles in the air in which she was to come and live with us, and keep a school for little children. But Phemie shook her head. 'This is the country where I am set to live, Cecy,' she said ; 'and teaching

Rosalie is the work that I am set to do ; and I don't think I should be right in leaving either the one or the other without some special call, such as you have.'

'O Phemie, you could not have helped saying yes if Charley had asked you to go.'

I suppose that there were drawbacks to perfect felicity, even during the time of my engagement ; but when I look back upon it, it seems like a cloudless summer day in the middle of winter. The clouds only rolled away for a short time, and then they closed over our sky again, and many years had to pass, and many storms to break over us, before the real spring-time came. Yet the memories of that autumn at Redscar were to me precious possessions, which I would not have parted with for the world in the long weary years that followed it.

X.

MANAGER BARBARA.

'—You might have turned and tried a man,
 Set him a space to weary and wear,
 And prove which suited best your plan,
 His best of hope or his worst despair,
 Yet end as he began.'—R. BROWNING.

IN September we had a great accession to our society: for George dislocated his arm at cricket, and was forbidden to use it for a month, so being useless in his business, he came down to Redscar. Professor Talbot and his daughter also came to get some sea air; and the whole family of the Barons took a house at the other end of the town. We all saw a good deal of one another: the Talbots were especially friendly, and we, as the older inhabitants, were able to lionize the new comers about the place.

Mrs Baron was not very gracious. George declared that she was jealous of my being engaged before her daughters; but whether she was or not, I do not

know. Alice and Edith were but little altered since I had seen them; they had quite as little individuality, and quite as much self-consciousness as ever. They had a great dislike to scrambling, and always had to be helped everywhere: and as George was pretty sure, in all our expeditions, to be some way in front with Barbara Talbot, they seldom obtained a gentleman's help, unless Charley happened to be of the party.

I do not know exactly how, but some one originated the idea of having private theatricals, tableaux, or something of that sort, while the party was at Red-scar. Barbara was a first-rate hand at acting—indeed, she seemed able to excel in anything she chose; and gradually the idea gathered shape, and it seemed to be a settled thing that there was to be a play, and that our house was to be the scene of it.

Phemie's eyes opened wide with astonishment when she heard this. 'Cecy,' she said, as soon as she could get me alone, 'are they really going to have a theatre in the house?'

'To fit up part of the drawing-room, and act there—that is all.'

‘To act a play?’ she said in a shocked voice.

‘Yes: why not?’

‘I thought plays were so very wicked.’

‘Some people think so; but I don’t know why they should. Of course you may choose a play that is objectionable, or you may not.’

‘Will you act?’

‘Oh no: I belong to Charley now, you know, and don’t want to make a spectacle of myself. But he is going to act, and George, and Miss Talbot; and I think it will be great fun to see.’

‘Then you don’t think it wrong?’

‘Not in moderation, any more than anything else. Do you think Charley would do anything wrong?’

I don’t know whether this last piece of reasoning was quite as cogent with Pheenie as with me: but she said no more, though she still looked puzzled.

I did not get on so well with Barbara Talbot as I had hoped to do. I thought that she wanted to study Charley’s character, as she had once tried to do to mine: and I did not see why she should take the liberty of studying people’s characters without asking their leave. George gave me a brotherly admonition.

‘ You might be a little civil to Miss Talbot, Cecy,’ he said. ‘ I told her a great deal about you, and she wanted to know you ; but you will shut up when she speaks to you. When she asked you this morning whether you liked Tennyson, all she could get out of you was, “ some of it.” ’

‘ Well, so I do, George,’ I said laughing.

‘ As if I had not heard you the other day inflicting it on poor old Charley, trying in vain to make him appreciate it.’

‘ Well, George, I would be civil if she would not be so fond of studying people’s characters. I don’t like to hear her pumping at Charley, trying to make out exactly what he likes and dislikes.’

‘ Jealous, upon my word ! I never thought it of you, Cecy.’

‘ I am not jealous in the least ; but I don’t like her to study me, and I don’t like her to study Charley. Surely one may keep one’s character to oneself, without letting other people, that one does not care for, see into one’s mind.’

‘ See into your fiddle-stick ! You are so particular, Cecy, ever since you have been engaged. It is

the contemplation of Charley's perfections that makes you so, I suppose. I shall tell him, that though he may be a swan, the rest of the world are not crows. Here come the Barons; if she studies that Edith's character, a precious deal she'll find.'

'They are come to talk about the theatricals; let us join the conclave.'

Our play was to be very unlike the ordinary run of private theatricals; for we intended to have no scenery and no expensive dresses. This necessarily limited us in the choice of a play; and Barbara, who evidently intended to be manager,—as, indeed, she had a right to be, knowing more about theatricals than any one else,—proposed one written by her father for the same sort of small private acting which we wished for. It was a curious, but thoughtful and striking little drama; the idea, and the principal characters, though not the plot, had evidently been suggested by Browning's 'Return of the Druses.' With one consent Barbara was allotted the post of the heroine, and her father that of the hero.

It was very amusing to see how Barbara managed us all. She was quite a woman of the world, and her

readiness and self-possession were a perpetual marvel to me. She always said just what she thought, sometimes without enough reference to the feelings of those whom she addressed; yet somehow no one was ever long offended with her; she was so bright, so clever, and never was at a loss. If only she would ever have lost that calm assumption of superiority to the world in general, I could have loved her; but somehow, that always stood in the way. Charles admired her, but never would say that he liked her; while George, it was every day more evident, was over head and ears in love with her.

Though I was not going to act, my time was fully occupied in helping in the preparations. Charles, George, and the Barons, who were to assist in subordinate capacities, were always coming to me to hear them repeat their parts; and before long I think I could have performed the office of prompter without book.

At last the important day came; the arrangements were all made, and the play of 'The False King' was perfect. The time was supposed to be the century after the death of King Arthur; the

actors a colony of Britons, who had taken refuge in Wales from the destroying hosts of Saxons, and who were expecting the return of King Arthur, who is to lead them back victorious into their own land. Winifred, the heroine, was to be personated by Barbara; and the False King himself by Professor Talbot, who was a remarkably tall, good-looking man, not much past middle age.

Of course, for a whole week before, nothing had been talked of but the play. Whatever subject of conversation was started, it was sure to come round to that: and at luncheon on the eventful day, every one was too full of their preparations even to eat.

‘Miss Campbell,’ said James, as she was sitting by Rosalie, watching that her charge did not choke herself with the stones of the plums to which her mother had plentifully helped her, ‘I hope you are coming down to see the performance this evening; we think it will be well worth seeing.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ answered Phemie under her breath, at the same time blushing up to her ears. I could not think what was the matter with her, for she had learnt by this time to speak generally without

blushing. The colour in her cheeks did not lessen at Rosalie's observation, 'Miss Campbell, you have put salt into your pudding instead of sugar!'

I saw Augusta looking severely across the table at poor little Phemie, and I dreaded a lecture for her; so immediately after dinner I followed her up to the school-room. 'Now, Phemie, what is the matter?'

'Oh, please, Cecy, do you think Mr and Mrs Hope will mind if I don't come down this evening?'

'Not come down? I hope you will, Phemie. We have all been working so hard at it, and I want you to like it.'

'I don't think I can. I don't think it would be right.'

'Why not? It is the most innocent play you can possibly imagine: and you are not going to act. How can it be wrong to look on?'

'If the one is wrong, the other is wrong,' said Phemie, more firmly than I had ever heard her speak before.

'Why should either be wrong? That is such an absurd idea of yours, Phemie. Because you have heard somebody say that some of the plays acted

at theatres fifty years ago were objectionable, you refuse to come and see a quiet little affair like ours.'

'Don't be angry, Cecy,' said Phemie, in her soft pleading little voice. 'I have always been told that plays are wrong, and so I am sure it would be wrong for me to go. I don't want to judge other people: you don't think it wrong, so I suppose it is not wrong for you to go. But you know we are told, "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth:" and I could not go without condemning myself, so I am sure I ought not.'

'I won't tease you about it any more, Phemie: you are much too good for this wicked world of ours. I will engage to see after Rosalie if anything happens, and no one will miss you.' And I left her as grateful as if I had bestowed some great favour upon her. Augusta called me into her room as I went by, and inquired, 'What could Miss Campbell mean by behaving in that ridiculous way at luncheon?'

Augusta was the last person who would have understood poor Phemie's little scruples, so I made some general excuse for her.

'I do wish she would learn a little ordinary self-

possession,' said Augusta; 'I only hope she won't teach Rosalie any of those foolish nervous ways. I chose her because she spoke prettily, and did not drop her h's, or anything of that sort; but really if she cannot learn to speak like other people without turning scarlet, I must part with her. I would not have Rosalie shy on any account.'

I remarked, truly enough, that I did not think that that calamity was to be feared for Rosalie.

At last the evening came: the guests arrived, and the performers were duly robed. I was behind the scenes, helping, and I kept Rosalie with me to get her out of the way. At last Barbara appeared. 'Cecy,' whispered George, 'look at her; isn't she magnificent to-night?' She was: she wore a long trailing scarlet robe which showed off her stately figure to full advantage; and her blue-black hair was twisted round her head like a crown. She was the sort of person whose good looks depended very much upon dress and colour; and certainly I had never seen her look so well as she did to-night. The curtain drew up, and disclosed George as Sir Egbert, a Saxon knight, deeply in love with Winifred. He proposed

to her in the first scene, and she refused him because he was the enemy of her people. George did not shine in this first scene: he got very red, and forgot his cue several times,—chiefly, I imagine, because he longed to say the words in earnest to Barbara which were brought to his lips in the play. Then, after one or two lighter scenes, the false King Arthur appeared: he is not a mere ambitious impostor, desirous of fame and glory for himself, but one who has begun as a true patriot, been led into deception, and now finds it impossible to retrace his steps. He is in love with Winifred, who looks up to him with adoring devotion as a supernatural being. Then comes a scene where Winifred asserts her determination to be present at an impending battle: and the pretended King Arthur, whose real name is Edyrn, vainly entreats her not to do so. The battle takes place: the Saxons are victorious, and the king is taken prisoner by Egbert the Saxon, who admits Winifred to see him. This was the scene of the play. The king has been mortally wounded, but will let no one know of his hurt. When Winifred comes in, stunned and bewildered by the defeat of the cause

which she believes to have been upheld by supernatural power, she is still further astounded by Edyrn's confession. He prays her to speak ; but she only replies by silent scorn, too deep for words to express. Edyrn, heart-broken and repentant, humbly accepts her scorn as his punishment : but at last he asks her if by any means he may do something to atone for his crime ; and she replies, ' Nothing—except to die.' To which he replies that he is dying : and on the strength of that alone he prays for her forgiveness. Then, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, her womanly tenderness returns : she discovers that, with all his untruth and imposture, she loves him still ; and he dies, happy in the thought of her forgiveness. So ended the play.

There was absolute silence for a few moments ; then came thunders of applause, which absolutely shook the room. I was just going up-stairs to tell Phemie how it had gone off, when I heard voices in a little side-room on the stairs, seldom used until the late upset in the house had called every nook and corner into requisition. I heard George's voice far more earnest and pleading than it had been when he was personating Egbert ; and I heard him say, ' Then

you don't refuse me hope, Barbara?' and she replied something in a low voice which I did not hear. How I longed to know what was taking place; but I did not like to run the chance of overhearing any more; and I had no opportunity of speaking to George that night, nor indeed until the middle of the next day.

Phemie was the first person I saw the next morning. She came in fresh and radiant as ever, bringing me a cup of tea to refresh me, and offering to help me to dress. Owing to which kindly assistance, I was down before anybody except Barbara Talbot, who was staying in the house. She looked paler than usual, and her eyes were softer than I had ever seen them before. I said I hoped she was not very tired: to which she replied, 'Thank you, I am never tired,' in a tone which implied that she was astonished that any one should think her liable to such a human weakness. After this our conversation languished, for I knew her too well for small talk, and yet was not intimate enough to speak with her on any subject near my heart.

But when she was going away that afternoon,

not merely to leave the house, but to return to London, she astonished me not a little. She was by no means given to making pretty speeches; but she said, 'I want you very much to promise to come and stay with us before you are married.'

'Thank you,' I began rather doubtfully; but she came close up to me and took my two hands.

'Do come. I want to know you better than I do. I hoped to do so this time, but somehow that play took up all one's time. Please promise me.'

I could not resist this, and I said that I would do my best to do so; and she stooped down and kissed me. It was not until she was gone that I found any opportunity of speaking to George. He was on the beach smoking a pipe when I joined him. I asked him the question point-blank, 'George, are you engaged to Barbara Talbot?'

He hesitated, reddened, and stammered, and then said, 'I will tell you how things stand, Cecy, if you will promise to keep our counsel. I asked her last night after the play; and she neither accepted nor rejected me. I told her I was poor, and had not the

means to marry at present ; but she said it was not because of that, but she should like to know more of me before she engaged herself. I said I thought she had seen enough of me lately : but she said no, and that it was better to repent before marriage than after. With all I could say, Cecy, she would not promise me any answer before Easter.’

Dearly as I hoped for George’s welfare, there was something so extremely original in Barbara’s reply that I could not help laughing. “‘Marry in haste and repent at leisure,’ is not her motto,” I said ; ‘I wonder what Charley would have said if I had told him that I could not give him an answer before next Christmas?’

‘He would have got one out of you,’ was George’s reply ; ‘but you and Barbara are not exactly the same sort of person. I am only thankful that she has not refused me point-blank ; for I am sure I never could ask her again, and after tying me down for such an awful time, I don’t see how she can refuse after it.’

‘I don’t think she has acted fairly towards you in

keeping you on tenterhooks for such a long time,' I said; 'but I can't help thinking that she really will be better than her word, and settle it before then.'

'I hope she will, I am sure. Now, isn't she a glorious creature, Cecy? I don't believe there is another girl in England to compare with her.' And with that he went off into a regular lover's rapture—boyish indeed, as well might be, considering that he was not yet one-and-twenty; but fresh and ardent enough to provoke my sympathy, even if it had been harder to rouse than it was.

'Do you know, Charley,' I said one day, 'this has taken away one of my chief regrets in thinking of leaving England? It seemed so unkind to leave poor old George all alone, and now he will be happily settled with a wife,—at least if she decides on having him. I hope it will be all settled before we marry.'

'Well,' said Charley, 'I suppose George likes her, or he would not want to marry her: but save me from that sort of woman. She will be master, just as much as James's wife is; though she is cleverer, and will manage to hide it better.'

‘George is not particularly like James in character,’ I said. ‘He has much more resistance in him.’

‘Worse for him. When two people want different things one must give in; and if neither choose to do so, woe betide them! All I say is, that she won’t be the one to give in.’

‘So you expect me always to give in to you, sir? You’ll find your mistake some day.’

‘I’ll wait till then. And now, Cecy, I want you to look at this letter which I had from the parson who comes over to read service in our new school. I wrote to say we were going to be married, and this is his answer.’

So I did obediently as I was bid; for Charley expected me to be interested in all the plans and projects of his Canadian life, and all the friends he had made there; and I had learnt all their names and their individual peculiarities by this time. I quite expected to recognize the Yankee family who lived close to Charley’s farm, and were always borrowing his farming implements and forgetting to return them; and another family, from the Western States, where the girls learnt Latin, but wore no shoes. Charley

had prepared me for the questions which I should certainly be asked, and we laughed very much over them, settling what were the correct answers to be given. What a life of uninterrupted sunshine seemed stretching before me then, and how different was the reality that followed !

XI.

DISENGAGED.

“ ‘There is war between us, love,
Which breaks all bonds but ours : we must remain
Sacred to one another.” So they talk’d,
Poor children, for their comfort : the wind blew ;
The rain of heaven and their own bitter tears,
Tears and the careless rain of heaven, mix’d
Upon their faces, as they kiss’d each other
In darkness, and above them roar’d the pine.’—TENNYSON.

IN the end of November we removed to London. Charley’s uncle, Mr Davis, had remained much in the same state for all these months ; but whether it was that the first frosts were too cold for his feeble life, or for any other reason, in the first week of the new year he suddenly grew worse and died. His senses returned for a few hours before his death ; he was able to recognize Charley, and spoke to him, telling him that he would have everything when he was gone. Charley was very glad of this little time of recognition : it showed so completely, he said, that

the old quarrel was forgotten, and that it was not only a question of money. At the same time, sorry as he really was for his uncle's death, it was impossible for his spirits to be very much depressed, since our marriage need no longer be deferred, and, if all was well, we purposed to sail at Easter for our Western home.

Augusta made no secret of her feelings on the subject. She was all anxiety for the will to be read, that it might be known how much Charley was to have. She laughed at our idea of going out to Canada. 'Wait till he finds a good round sum of money in his hands, Cecy, and he will never talk about such a thing again.' On the day fixed for the reading of the will she had been saying this all the afternoon; and I took my work, and sat in the window, looking out through the gathering fog for Charley's broad shoulders and brown beard, eager to get him to disprove, with his own lips, Augusta's predictions.

She went up to dress for dinner, and still he did not come. I waited a little longer, sitting in the firelight, looking into the fire, and there reading happy

pictures of the future. At last I heard his step coming up-stairs : he entered ; sat down on the chair nearest the door, and leant his face on his hands. In a moment I was by his side. ‘Charley, what has happened?’

‘I hardly know yet,’ he said in a strange dry tone. I knelt down by his side, and he took my hands in his, drew me forward, and kissed me. That action seemed to break the spell.

‘Cecy,’ he said, gravely, but in his natural voice, ‘what should you say if I told you that all our hopes are at an end—for the present, at least? My darling, it is so; there is no will—at least, it is not a valid one. All the money goes to the Simpsons. There is a hundred pounds left me, and that is all.’

And there he broke down, and I also, when the truth broke upon me. It seemed that the latest will made which was valid had been made just at the time when Charles had gone off to America, in disgrace with his uncle. Since then, probably just before his illness, Mr Davis had made another, which only required to be witnessed to make it valid : but this, probably in the confusion of his faculties caused by

his impending illness, he had omitted to have done. This will left everything, with the exception of a few legacies, to Charles : and evidently expressed the old man's latest intentions.

But it was not at first that I saw the whole consequence of the loss. We should be poor instead of rich, I knew ; but why should our marriage be postponed ? I was willing to bear roughness and poverty, and so was Charles : why should we not be married as we had proposed ?

Gently, but gravely, Charley explained to me how very poor he was, and how wrong it would be for us to think of marrying at present. ' I have nothing whatever but my own hands to reckon upon, Cecy. At some future time, perhaps, it may be different. If you are willing to wait for me,—please God, if I prosper, I will come to you and say, ' I have made a home for you : come and be my wife. But till then, Cecy—'

His voice faltered, and he stopped for fear of breaking down altogether. Then he rose from his chair, and began pacing up and down the room, as if by monotonous movement he could still the trouble

of his mind. Some men might have spoken bitterly, and railed against the dead, or the living, or even the Providence which rules the world—which in such circumstances they call fate. Charley did none of these, yet he did not feel it the less. At last he came and stood by me against the fireplace, and putting his hand on my shoulder, said, ‘Little Cecy! How shall I stand being away from you for so many years?’

I felt too unhappy myself to be able to give him any consolation.

‘How long do you think you can wait for me, Cecy?’

‘Till we both die.’ The words broke from me passionately, almost as if they were not my own.

‘And such a long way off, too! All the Atlantic between. So far that if one of us were ill or dying, we could not see the other. It is very hard to bear.’

Then he bent over me, and took my two hands in his, as he so often used to do.

‘Cecy, you must help me to bear this: don’t make it harder for me, darling. We must be brave and strong, both of us. Don’t let me think that you can’t bear up under it; it will be much worse for me.

For I must always think that all your trouble is my doing : if I had left you in peace and never said anything to you, I should only have had my own burden to bear.'

I told him—what else could I say—that the knowledge of his love was far more precious to me than 'any want-begotten rest;' that even the pain that came with it was better than pleasure without it: and I think I persuaded him of this at last. But a further trial awaited us, for which we were not prepared.

On this first night Augusta and James both seemed very sorry for us, and consoled with us with apparent heartiness. But the next day Augusta began to drop hints about 'things not going on as they were, now that everything was so much changed.' The third day, after breakfast, when Charley came as usual to see me, she said that James wanted to see us both in the library: to which we therefore betook ourselves.

James was standing with his back to the fire, looking anxious and flurried. Augusta was sitting in the arm-chair. We both came in and stood together: and as ludicrous thoughts will come into

one's mind on the least ludicrous occasions, I could not help thinking that Charley and I were just like two school-children whom I had once seen brought up before Mr and Mrs Baron to be scolded for misbehaviour in church. James cleared his throat several times before he began.

‘Sit down, Charley—and Cecy too. I wanted to speak to you both—that is, I am very sorry for it, but we—you thought, Augusta,’—addressing his wife.

‘Don’t put it upon me, I beg, James. It was the conclusion which both of us arrived at.’

‘What is the conclusion?’ said Charles, gravely and rather sternly.

‘We think it would be much better for both of you to break off your engagement, since circumstances are now so changed. I’m sorry, I am sure, Charley: I’d sooner have had you for a brother than any man I know.’

‘I think you must see it yourself,’ said Augusta.

Charley bowed, with an air that showed that he did not recognize her right to interfere in the question. Then he said, addressing himself to James, ‘If I understand you right, James, you think it would

be advisable for Cecy and me to break off our engagement, in consequence of my late disappointment.'

'That is it,' said James. 'I am sure no man could regret it more — but, you see, she is only seventeen—'

'I give her perfect liberty to do so if she chooses,' answered Charley, letting go my hand. 'Cecy, it rests entirely with you : if you are afraid of waiting so long and wish to be free, say so. I would not bind you for one moment against your will.'

'I am not afraid of waiting, and I do not wish to be free. I am engaged to Charley, James, and I do not intend to break my word. If he is in trouble, is that any reason why I should desert him?'

Augusta spoke now. 'Do not be so childish, Cecy. Look at the case sensibly. Here is Charles Hope, almost penniless, going out to the colonies for an indefinite time—no one can tell for how long—leaving you tied to him, at your age too, when, as one may say, you can hardly know your own mind. It may be twenty years before he has enough for you

to marry upon—for it is not as if you had any money of your own, and of course you cannot expect an allowance from us.’

‘I never thought of expecting such a thing,’ I said warmly.

‘Excuse me,’ said Charles, ‘but I do not see exactly how Mrs Hope is interested in the matter. It appears to me to lie between my cousin James, Cecy, and me.’

‘On the contrary, Mr Charles Hope, it appears to me that I am decidedly interested. Do you call it nothing that Cecy is a penniless girl, entirely on my hands until she is married, without home or shelter except what I give her? I was glad enough when I thought that she would so soon be comfortably settled: but now that it comes to an indefinite engagement, the case is altered.’

I was bursting out with some reply, but Charley pressed my hand, and answered for me sternly, but quietly.

‘I am sorry that my promised wife is such a burden upon you. Happily, she has another brother, who will not, I think, look upon her in that light;

and who, I presume, is as much her guardian as your husband.'

'George is not yet of age,' said James; 'I am Cecy's only guardian, and I have a right, I believe—' in obedience to a warning glance from his wife —'to insist upon the breaking off of this engagement.'

'I do not see,' said Charles, 'however much you may insist, how our engagement is to be cancelled without our own consent.'

'And you will never have my consent,' I said.

'Perhaps you have not considered,' said Augusta, 'that if Cecy's guardian disallows this engagement, he may legally forbid her to write or receive letters; and she must obey, or be involved in underhand or clandestine proceedings, which will be little creditable to her or you.'

'You may legally do so, perhaps,' said Charley, 'but not lawfully. James, I cannot believe that you, at least, would treat us in such a dishonourable way.'

James fidgeted, and tried to escape from his wife's eye, which was severely fixed upon him. But he

could not do so; and as a man in the wrong invariably does, he tried to carry the war into the enemy's country.

'Dishonourable,' he said angrily. 'You have no right to apply such a word to me, sir.'

'When a man does what he has no right to do, and allows himself to forget his duty to his orphan sister under the persuasions of his wife, I cannot allow that he has any title to be considered honourable,' said Charley.

'James,' said Augusta, rising from her seat, 'do you mean to stay to hear yourself insulted in this way?'

'I do not wish to insult you, or to quarrel with you,' said Charley, controlling the hot anger which reddened his cheeks. 'I only ask you to leave Cecy alone to follow her own inclinations in this matter. If this were the beginning of it all—if I, in my present position, had come to you and asked you for her,—there might be some plausibility in your refusal. But it is not so; we have already been engaged for several months, and breaking off an engagement of several months' standing is very different from not

allowing one at all. And let me remind you that it is hardly brotherly in you to make the avowed pretext for breaking it off that you grudge her a home, and wish to get her off your hands as soon as possible.'

'I don't grudge her a home,' began James ; but Augusta took up his words in the middle. 'It is no use to talk in this way, Mr Hope. It is plainly unadvisable that the engagement should continue, and if you would look upon things with unprejudiced eyes, you would confess the same. I entirely agree with my husband that this ought to be put a stop to, and that it will be on all accounts best for you and Cecy to part.'

Perhaps James might have relented a little, had it not been that Charles's epithet 'dishonourable' was rankling in his mind. 'It is quite true,' he said nervously ; 'it will be best for her, and best for you.'

'Allow me to be the judge of that,' said Charley, rather bitterly ; 'and let me beg of you, if for motives of your own interest you choose to ruin all my hopes of happiness, not to put it down to consideration for me.'

‘My own interest!’ said James angrily; ‘I think at least you need not insult me in my own house, sir.’

‘At least,’ said Augusta, ‘your conduct is a proof that we are wise in not allowing Cecy to continue this engagement—’

‘I consider myself engaged to Charles, Augusta,’ I said, ‘whether you allow it or not.’

‘Indeed!’ a becoming spirit for a young girl. However, Cecy, you may be sure of this: I shall not allow you to receive letters, nor to send them, if I know it: and you know what is thought of a girl who resorts to underhand means.’

‘I shall resort to no “underhand means,”’ I said. ‘I shall enclose my letters to George, and get him to forward them. I know that he will take my part.’

‘Remember, if you please, that you are at present in my house,’ said Augusta: ‘and while you still remain there you are bound to respect my orders.’

While we had been speaking, the battle of words had been continued between Charley and James. At last the former said, ‘We are both too angry to continue this conversation now. Am I to understand

that it is your ultimatum, that our engagement, as far as Cecy is concerned, is to be utterly at an end ?’

‘You are,’ said James ; and Charley bowed, and went out into the hall. I followed him. ‘Cecy, my darling,’ he said, ‘I must have one more talk with you. To-morrow at eight o’clock I will be here. My darling ! I never thought of this.’

‘What does it matter, Charley ?’ I said, feigning a braver tone than I felt. ‘As long as we are true to one another, what does it matter whether James and Augusta reckon us as engaged or not ?’

He sighed, but did not answer ; and soon after he was gone. I spent the rest of the day in my room, and did not emerge again until early the next morning, when I stood at the library window watching for Charley. It was a dark wet day, and one umbrella after another passed along, so drenched with wet that they reflected the leaden colour of the sky. At last I saw him, wrapped in his thick coat, but disdaining the shelter of any umbrella, and I flew to open the door.

He followed me into the library, where the bright

fire formed a pleasant contrast to the dreariness without.

‘Have you seen George?’ was my first question.

‘Yes: he said he had met James and his wife, but that together they were utterly impracticable. Alone, he thought he might have talked James over: but as for her—I never felt before what it was to have an enemy!’

Certainly, few men were less likely to have enemies than my Charley, with his happy temper, his genial spirits, his generous heart: and yet he had not escaped.

‘Cecy, I have at last come to a decision,’ he said. ‘God knows what it has cost me to make it. But it is for your sake, my darling: the world is sometimes very harsh in its judgments, and I would not have you blamed even unjustly. And your sister-in-law will spread about the worst reports of your conduct—clandestine correspondence—underhand dealings—just to cover her own ill doings in the matter. I have decided that it will be right that we should part until you are of age and free.’


‘Charley!’

‘Indeed, my darling, there is no other way. I cannot tell you what it will be to me to be such a long time without you, without a line of your writing or a letter from you, telling me what is happening to you. And, of course, in doing this I leave you perfectly free. Perhaps what they say may be true—though I don’t think so myself—that you are too young to know your own mind. And it may very likely happen that before you are one and twenty you may see some one that you like much better than me.’

‘Charley, I thought you knew me better than that,’ I said, reproachfully.

‘It may be so, Cecy. I have neither riches nor cleverness like the people who come about you in this London life, and I could not wonder if some of them took a fancy to you. And, remember, Cecy, if they do—and you like any of them—don’t let the thought of me interfere with your happiness. You are free.’

Any one may guess how I answered Charley : how I told him that my love was his, and that it could never belong to any one else. But though I think he believed me, he would not recall his words. I was



free, he said, until I was twenty-one; when he would, if possible, come over to England and claim me. If not, he would write, and still give me the option of engaging myself again; but until then we were to part.

And then, all at once, he broke down, leant his head upon the table, and hid his face. ‘Charley,’ I said, ‘you may trust me. I will be true to you, and you will be true to me. Let us wait on in hope until better days come.’

‘And if they never come?’ he said. ‘Who can answer for anything in this world? Three years and a half is an awful time; all may be altered by then. One of us may be dead—who can tell?’

‘Even then there is a better hope for us,’ I said gently. ‘And perhaps, Charley, if we do our best in this time of waiting, it may be better for us in the end—I may learn to make you a better and more useful wife, and anyhow, if we are only patient, I know it will turn out right some day.’

So we went on talking: sometimes Charley was the comforter, sometimes I was; but at last the end came. James came down and entered the library.

He drew back at the sight of Charley, but the latter spoke to him.

‘ You may be satisfied at last. I have told Cecy this morning that I leave her perfectly free from her engagement ; I intend neither to write to her nor to communicate with her until she is twenty-one, and free to do as she likes. Now that you have obtained your point, I hope that you and your wife will be satisfied.’

‘ I am very sorry,’ began James ; but Charley cut him short.

‘ If ever you wish to prove yourself sorry, let George know ; he will know my address, and will write to me. I can do no good by staying here any longer. Be kind to her—that is all.’ And he was leaving the room, and I was following, when James said, ‘ Shake hands before you go.’

Charley looked at first hardly inclined to comply ; but he mastered himself. ‘ I believe it is your wife’s doing, James, not your own,’ he said. ‘ I wish you were enough of a man to stand up for the right, and not knock under to her. Good-bye !’ and they shook hands. I do not think that Charley was sorry after-

wards, for it was the last time that they ever met.

But now came the real parting between Charley and me ; and that was sadder than I can well bear to describe, even now, though it is so long past. At last it was over, and I listened to his footsteps on the splashing pavement until I could no longer distinguish them amidst the distant surge and roar of the more crowded streets ; and that happy chapter of my life was at an end.

In a week's time Charley sailed for Canada ; and I remained behind in the dreary darkness of a London winter. If it had not been for Phemie's sympathy, I don't know how I could have supported my loneliness ; but she, with her quiet, unobtrusive sweetness, helped me to bear my trouble, and even brought me back to a healthy interest in things of every-day life. But in one respect there was a difference between my feelings now and before ; for it seemed as if a gulf had opened between me and Augusta. I could not look upon her in the same way as I had done before her quiet avowal that she looked upon me as a burden to be got off her hands as soon as possible ; and she, in her turn, was less smooth of speech, and much

more petulant and exacting than she had been before. Only one consolation I had : which was, that whenever George married, I was engaged to go and live with him and his wife. I suggested that Barbara might not approve ; but he replied that Barbara was extremely indignant at the way in which I had been treated, and both wished for nothing but to try and make it up to me in some way. But all this time Barbara had not given a definite answer to George's proposal, and refused to do so until the time she had first named.

XII.

REJECTED.

'Time and chance are but a tide,
Slighted love is sair to bide.
Shall I, like a fool, quoth he,
For a haughty hizzie dee ?
She may go to France for me !'—BURNS.

ESTER came, and found us settled in a pleasant house in the country, which went by the name of The Beeches. Barbara Talbot had written to ask me to come and stay with her ; but Augusta said that she could not possibly spare me, and Barbara was invited to spend a week with us instead.

I looked forward with great anxiety to this visit of Barbara's ; for George had a week's holiday, and was coming also, and naturally I supposed that they would now settle their affairs. Augusta was in a high state of delight at the prospect : as she said the Talbots were so well connected, and she had heard that they had lately become acquainted with

her cousins, the Vanes. How Augusta *always* happened to know everything about her aristocratic cousins, and whom they visited, puzzled me, seeing that they utterly ignored her.

‘They really will have no excuse for not returning my call,’ she said one day, ‘the next time that we go to London. It is very strange that they don’t. But no one can say, now at least, that I have married beneath me; and if you would only exert yourself a little in society, Cecy, you might marry well.’

‘Thank you, I do not wish to marry.’

‘Come, Cecy, I will have no more of this fooling. . You are not engaged to Charles Hope, and he is not engaged to you; and it is your duty to try and get married. You must learn not to be so childish.’

To which I made no reply: for I had learnt by experience that it was worse than useless to argue with Augusta. But now, as sometimes happened, she took exception at my silence, and went on.

‘Of all persons I know, you are the most provoking to live with, Cecy. You never will believe that all the pains I take are entirely for your good—’ and

in this strain she continued for the next five minutes. At last, as she urged me to speak, I said,

‘I don’t wish to discuss the subject, Augusta. If we go on talking for ever, we shall never agree. I don’t intend to marry any one but Charles : and indeed, I think it is rather useless talking about it, for no one has yet asked me.’

‘That is just the thing : and no one is likely to ask you while you sit so still and silent, and will hardly even take the trouble to sing. What else did you have those lessons for, do you think, except that you might sing at my parties?’

As this was the sort of thing which went on day after day, I longed for Barbara’s visit as a relief to myself.

She came : tall, magnificent, and imperious as ever ; and it struck me as strange, that her manner to George should be what it was—pleasant and friendly, but not allowing any confidential talks, or apparently even caring to accept the homage which he laid before her. As soon as he tried to bring the conversation into a personal direction, she changed the subject, throwing a few degrees more of stateliness

into her manner and the inflections of her voice. George was a very devoted lover, but his man's pride began to be roused: and sometimes he turned away and would not speak to her for five minutes. Yet I could not think that she would have accepted this invitation if she had intended to refuse him, and I tried to comfort George by saying that it might be a form of embarrassment which led her to put on such a manner.

Croquet was our great amusement that spring. There was a pleasant, smooth, shady ground, under some large chestnut trees, which were already expanding into their summer greenness. The set of croquet had been bought for Rosalie, and the young lady stood upon her rights and insisted on playing whenever she was not at her lessons. This necessitated Phemie's attendance, and we wanted to make her join our game, but she refused, and sat under the trees with her work, looking on. When we were not at the game, however, I found her playing to amuse Rosalie once or twice, and I asked her why she would not join us.

'I had rather not, Cecy, please. It would be

like putting myself forward, and I don't think Mrs Hope would like it.'

'What harm can there be, Phemie? We should like it so very much: and I am sure Augusta could not make any real objection.'

But Phemie was obstinate, and perhaps would never have come to play croquet with us at all, when one day, when Augusta came to the ground to see us playing, Rosalie called out, 'Mamma, we want Miss Campbell to make up a game of six, besides papa, and she won't. Do tell her to.' So Phemie was bidden to play, and when she had begun, we all saw how she enjoyed it.

A few days before George was to leave us a little incident brought affairs to a crisis between him and Barbara. He had to go over to the nearest town, and at breakfast he expressed his determination to ride a certain kicking horse of James's, which had already thrown two grooms, and refused to act at all rationally, but which Augusta was reluctant to sell on account of its beauty. Barbara said quietly, 'I strongly recommend you to do no such thing.'

'Why not?' he said, turning to her with a bright

exultant smile,—a peculiar look which I often remember noticing in him at this time, and but seldom afterwards.

‘Because it is contrary to common sense.’

‘Riding?’

‘Risking your neck.’

‘I do not acknowledge the risk.’

‘There is no bravery in under-estimating danger,’ she said gravely: and George, I saw, was a little piqued. We did not see him again until late in the afternoon, when he returned safe from his ride. ‘Where are all your ominous prophecies, young ladies?’ he said.

‘You have been riding the gray horse?’ said Barbara sternly.

‘I have, and have come back, as you see, with a whole skin.’

Barbara turned away, and would not speak to him. I went away, thinking that they could best settle their difference without me; and I went into a green shady walk—a favourite haunt of mine, for there was a break in the foliage in one place which opened out a view of the far-off eastern hills, beyond

which, I loved to think, lay my dear old home, Highthorpe—ah, how far away! Here it was that I moralized over the foolishness of Barbara and George in tormenting one another, and thought how different it had been with Charley and me last year. ‘Ah,’ I reflected, ‘if the time ever comes when they are separated as we are, they will wish then that they had made each other as happy as possible when they had the chance. But every one must learn by their own experience, I suppose, and not by other people’s.’

We had croquet that evening as usual. What had passed between George and Barbara while I was away I do not know, but its effects were plainly to be seen in her stern silence, and his being decidedly out of temper. The evening passed away rather heavily; in the morning I hoped they would have forgotten the cause of disagreement. But it was not so. Phemie and Rosalie joined our croquet as usual; and, to my great surprise, George went up to Phemie and began what on his part was most decidedly a flirtation. She answered quietly, though her colour was a little heightened, and her eyes more dropt down than usual. Then she tried to move away to another part

of the ground, but in vain ; George still followed her there. It was a great mistake on his part : if he hoped to rouse Barbara's love by exciting her jealousy, he was greatly deceived. She stood by watching his flirtation with Phemie, her features graver and sterner than usual, but without any sign of wounded affection. She seemed to be weighing him in the balances, and finding him wanting. ' George,' I whispered, as we were consulting over the direction of a croquet ball, ' take care, you are spoiling your other game.'

' Good generalship wins,' he replied, carrying on my parable.

' But yours is not good generalship. Do mind what you are about.'

He laughed—rather a forced laugh, I fancied—and continued his flirtation with Phemie—if that could be called flirtation which was all on one side. And still Barbara watched them with the same grave, stern observation. The evening passed much as the one before had done ; and Sunday morning dawned—the last day of George's week at home ; for early the next morning he was to return to London. As we were walking back from church, he seemed to be in a

more conciliatory mood, and tried to get Barbara to fall behind with him; but she refused, and with a fresh access of pique, he turned to Phemie, who was walking by the side of Rosalie's Shetland pony. On Sundays, Phemie always wore a black shawl and a little dowdy Quaker-like bonnet; but even this unfavourable costume could not spoil the delicate beauty of her face, with its exquisite colouring and bright hair, and I compared her in my own mind to some beautiful hot-house flower, whose radiant petals seem to be all the more shown off by a rough and sober-tinted calyx. I noticed her colour deepen as George came near her; and I thought of another possibility which had never crossed my mind before—that he, in his foolish love of amusement, and desire to pique Barbara, might be raising false hopes in her simple little mind.


This state of things, however, only lasted until we reached home. Barbara relaxed a little—a very little, of her stateliness, and George returned to his homage. All that afternoon he was in vain seeking for an opportunity to speak to her, but he did not get one; and it was only after dinner that he suc-

ceeded in 'putting his fate to the touch, to win or lose it all.' I saw him lean over Barbara's chair, and heard him say in a low voice, 'May I have a word with you in the garden?' She rose in compliance, but one look at her face gave me small hopes for George's success. It was so intensely stern and grave; yet there was an expression in it very unlike Barbara's usual calm composure, a look which gave me the impression that she had had a struggle with herself, and had succeeded in hardening her will against her affections.

I lingered about the hall, ostensibly watching the sunset, but my thoughts were busy with the two figures I saw now and then, as they walked upon the croquet lawn under the chestnut trees. Presently I saw Barbara returning alone; and not wishing to meet her, I escaped into a side room while her footsteps passed up-stairs: and then I went out into the garden where George was pacing up and down. One look at his face told me all.

'She has refused you!' I said. 'After leading you on to believe—'

He did not say anything for some time: he only



paced quickly backwards and forwards, switching at the grass and the budding twigs round the tree-boles. At last he said, 'You were right, Cecy ; you tried to warn me. She refused me point-blank ; and when I asked her why, she said that my conduct had been—had showed that I was not in earnest. And then when I asked her to give me time to prove that I was, she taunted me ; she spoke in such a way that—that I see it was all a mistake that I ever thought of her.'

'It must be only a fit of anger,' I said ; 'she will relent.'

'No, Cecy,' he said, 'I see what she is, and I know she is not the wife for me. If she relented ever so much, I would not ask her again. I am having it out now, and after this we will not speak of it any more.'

I saw that whatever had passed between them, Barbara's mode of rejection had not been such as to soothe George's feelings ; and that he felt more than the mere vexation and pain which a man must always feel when he loves truly and is rejected. I was sorry, too, for more reasons than I could express to him : for the more I had seen of Barbara the more I learnt

to appreciate her true good sense and high principle, even though I had never actually succeeded in loving her as I had always hoped to love George's wife; and I thought that his character had the genial good-nature and practical test that was wanting in hers, while she had the talent, brilliancy, and noble aspirations which he wanted. They would have made a good pair; but now that was at an end for ever.

When we went indoors, Barbara was sitting in the drawing-room with a book in her hand; but I noticed that the page was unturned, and that she was not really reading. She and George studiously avoided speaking to one another, and when the evening came to an end it was a relief to all parties. She bid us all good-night with an air apparently as unmoved and unconcerned as if nothing had happened; and I was the more astonished when, as I was brushing out my hair, I heard a knock at the door, and opening it, admitted Barbara's tall figure in her scarlet dressing-gown.

'Cecy,' she said, carefully shutting the door, 'I don't know whether your brother has told you what has happened between us. I wished to tell you, be-

cause I did not wish you to think worse of me than I deserved.'

'George told me that you had refused him,' I said, still brushing my hair as I spoke, and conscious that my tone sounded awkward and blunt. 'But I think we had better not talk about it, because naturally, as his sister, I should be inclined to take his side.'

'I did not think there were any sides to take,' she said with her usual composure. 'Surely you think that I was at perfect liberty, under the conditions between us, to refuse him or not as I thought best.'

'I don't think that you had any right to allow him to half-engage himself to you for so many months, if at the end you intended to reject him.'

'I did not come here to defend myself,' said Barbara (I had thought that this was her purpose, as I did not see what else it could be), 'I came to tell you my reasons for acting as I did. I never could consent to marry any one who fell short of my own standard—it may be a mistake or not, that is the fact. I thought that your brother came as near it—nearer,

perhaps,—than any man I ever met ; and I gave him this time of probation that I might judge whether he did come up to it.'

'I beg your pardon,' I said, 'but I cannot see what right you have to set yourself up on a pedestal above all other human beings, to judge them. Ours are not the days of chivalry, where a lady sat on a throne and gave prizes to all the knights who aspired to her hand.'

I was rather astonished at my own boldness in speaking thus to Barbara ; but I was hot and indignant when I heard her speaking in this way, as if no one who was not absolutely faultless were fit to mate with her. She paused for a little, as if to weigh the force of my observation ; and then went on, more proudly than before.

'As I told you, I am not here to defend myself. You and your brother are at liberty to make what strictures you please upon my conduct. I gave your brother the time I spoke of ; and until this last visit I saw nothing in him to lower the high opinion I had formed of him. But, somehow, these last few days he has shown qualities which I had hoped were not

in him — recklessness, fickleness, love of admiration—’

‘I am his sister,’ I said, as quietly as I could.

‘I beg your pardon. I forgot that your interest in him is nearer than mine *now*.’

‘And you miss out of your calculations the fact that your behaviour has been, from first to last, the cause of any change in his?’

She looked extremely astonished, but said nothing. ‘All I can say, Barbara,’ I said, ‘is this—and I am so much younger and less clever than you, that I am afraid you will not think it becoming in me to say so—but I think it is your doing, from beginning to end. George loved you as truly as any man ever loved a woman, and you have refused him simply because he does not come up to certain imaginary standards of yours,—really, as it seems to me, because you don’t love him as he deserves to be loved, and therefore I cannot say I am sorry. I should be sorry to see George throw himself away on any one who did not appreciate him.’

Barbara’s colour perceptibly deepened. ‘That is your view of the matter,’ she said; ‘I suppose I must

not blame you for it, as it is your affection for your brother which misleads you. But it is of no use our talking any longer. Good-night.'

Yet despite all her assumed indifference, I heard Barbara walking up and down in her room, next to mine, until long past midnight ; and when she came down to breakfast the next morning her complexion looked sallow, and had dark circles under the eyes, the effect which is always produced upon a dark complexion by a sleepless night. George was gone : and the next day she also went away, astonishing me not a little by the warmth of the kiss which she gave me when she bid me good-bye. Assuredly there was no person whose ways, movements, and actions were more incomprehensible, and less capable of being foretold, than were Barbara Talbot's.

The failure of this match, which she had prided herself upon making up, was a sore vexation to Augusta. She had been very anxious to have the Talbots as a connection of her family ; more especially as she was now settled in a country neighbourhood, and found the old county families almost as little inclined to receive her upon equal terms as her aristo-

cratic cousins were. A less assuming woman would probably have attained her end far more easily ; but Augusta was a person whose mind was full of thoughts of her own importance, and whose manners, therefore, were far less good than they would have been had she been more certain of her position. Somehow, I do not exactly know how or why, she took it into her head that I had been at the bottom of the breaking off of the marriage, and that for reasons of my own I had fomented any little differences between George and Barbara which might otherwise have come to nothing. At last I made George tell her that I had nothing to do with it, hoping that she would be satisfied ; but the suspicion only slept, and came out again all the more strongly when circumstances revived it.

George was certainly altered by his disappointment : he had grown older, more of a man and less of a boy, graver, and more devoted to his work. He wrote and received letters from Charley now and then, but he was proverbially a bad letter-writer, and a long interval elapsed before he could make up his mind to acquaint the latter with his discomfiture with regard

to Barbara. Charley thought it against his pledge to James to send or receive any message to or from me; and it was by no means the same thing to him to write accounts of his farming operations or settler neighbours to George, as it would have been to write them to me. So, beyond a monthly note covering about half the first page on George's part, and a page and a half from Charley, the correspondence languished.

The early green of spring scorched into the darker hue of summer; the buttercups faded; the hay was cut and carried, and the harvest began; and yet there was no change in my fate, and none, as far as I could see, was likely ever to take place. But I little knew how eventful the autumn of that year was to be, and that my dull, purposeless, useless existence with James and Augusta was coming to an end. Yet so it was, and by means which I little expected to bring it about.

XIII.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

'While, O my heart—as white sails shiver,
 And crowds are passing, and banks stretch wide,
 How hard to follow, with lips that quiver
 That moving speck on the far-off side !

'Farther—farther—I see it, know it—
 My eyes brim over, it melts away ;
 Only my heart to my heart shall show it,
 While I walk desolate day by day.'—JEAN INGELow.

GEORGE had hitherto spent his Sundays with the Browns ; but this summer old Mr Brown fell into bad health, and was ordered to go abroad ; and in consequence George fell into the habit of usually coming to us from Saturday till Monday. James and Augusta never went to church in the afternoon, but George and I always joined Phemie, and Rosalie on her pony, both morning and afternoon ; and I think it was about this time that he ceased to find Phemie's soft eyes, and delicate colour which deepened when he spoke to her, insipid, as he had pronounced

them to be at first. She had never known the whole history of his love affair with Barbara, although she had known that he admired her, and that she had discouraged him; and perhaps the fact of Phemie's only knowing this was a relief to George, just as the contrast which in all respects she afforded to Barbara made her more charming in his eyes; for Barbara had wounded his self-esteem in a way which a man finds harder to forgive than a woman.

One summer afternoon in August, on coming out of church, I was detained by an old woman whom I sometimes visited, and had to listen to the description of her son's maladies for at least a quarter of an hour. The others walked back without me; and on my arrival at home I found no one but Rosalie, who complained that Miss Campbell had locked her door, and she could not get in, and it was very unkind of her, because Miss Campbell had taken her honeysuckles with her, and she could not get them back.

I pacified the injured little mortal, and ran upstairs to Phemie's room. I listened before knocking, and thought I heard a sound of sobbing. Fearing

that Phemie had had bad news of her relatives, or was otherwise in trouble of some kind, I knocked and asked her to admit me.

She let me in, and I saw that my suspicions were correct. The fair delicate face was flushed and swollen with crying; and when I asked the reason, the tears began again. Phemie sobbed out, 'I don't know what I ought to do, Cecy—I will tell you, and you shall tell me what you think is right. Oh, if I only knew!'

And on pressing her with questions, she confided to me, with many blushes and tears, that that afternoon, as they were walking home from church, George had asked her to be his wife.

I was astonished, for I had not known that George contemplated such a thing; but I loved and trusted Phemie too fully not to be glad that he had turned his thoughts that way, whatever the world in general might think of her social inferiority.

'My darling Phemie,' I said, 'I am very glad. There is no one in all the world that I would sooner have for a sister than you. But what is there to cry

about?' for she had relapsed into sobs. 'Don't you love him?'

'I must not,' I heard at last. 'It would be wrong.'

'What would be wrong?'

'Mrs Hope would think it so very wrong. I am not a real lady like you; I am only a nursery governess; and I am sure it would be wrong for me to think of listening to him—'

'But, Phemie dear, Mrs Hope has no real authority over him or you either.'

'It would be very wrong for me to listen to him—here at least,' was her tearful answer; and I knew well that on a question of right and wrong Phemie was inflexible.

'Then what do you mean to do? Do you mean to wreck your happiness and his for a scruple, Phemie? You must say yes or no.'

'I have said no,' was the reply in a low weary tone, as she sat on the floor, looking at a wild white honeysuckle which she held in her hand.

'You have said no? Did you mean him to take no for an answer?'

‘I could not help it,’ she answered. ‘It would not have been right for me to say anything else.’

‘But, Phemie, if there were no obstacle in the way, if Mrs Hope did not exist, if you were not a governess, and he came and asked you, would you still say no?’

Phemie’s colour deepened to scarlet, and she drooped her head so that I could not see her face; but she uttered no word.

‘Forgive me, Phemie darling,’ I said; ‘but I can’t see why something should not be arranged, or why you should give up all ideas of happiness without a struggle. You love George, I know; and I don’t know why, if he loves you, as he says he does, we should not get over these little obstacles.’

‘I could not say anything else, Cecy,’ pleaded Phemie. ‘You know we are not sent here to think about being happy, but doing right.’

‘Well, now you have relieved your mind, I will relieve mine, without telling you anything about it till it is done, so that you shall not be a party to it. And don’t cry any more: we will manage it all.’ And so with a kiss I left her in search of George,

whose first remark was, 'I have been trying my luck again, Cecy, with pretty nearly the same result.'

Upon which I explained the state of affairs. George gave a long whistle. 'I am not responsible to Augusta,' he said.

'But she is, in a way.'

'Well, what is to be done?'

'She must leave her situation, and you must go and court her at her uncle's, the grocer's.'


George made a face, expressive of anything but pleasure at the prospect.

'If she is good enough for you to think of marrying, she is good enough for you to take a little trouble about.'

'Of course,' he said rather impatiently.

'I hope you do appreciate her,' I said, 'and are not taking up with her just out of pique because Barbara Talbot refused you.'

'You are a little fool, Cecy,' was the brotherly compliment I received. He went on more gently, 'I confess to having made an awful donkey of myself about Barbara Talbot, but she disabused me of my



illusion herself. I know her now for what she is—a proud, imperious, haughty girl, who would never have suited me, nor I her. It was a good thing for me when I made that discovery.'

'Then you really do care for Phemie?' I said rather wistfully, for something in his manner did not satisfy me. Perhaps it was only the difference between a boy's and a man's love—but when I saw his present matter-of-fact mood, I could not help recalling the enthusiastic raptures to which he had given utterance on the subject of Barbara.

'Do you suppose I should ask her to be my wife if I did not?' growled George. 'Do you think I should want to marry a grocer's niece unless I cared for her? Really, Cecy, since that affair of yours with Charley, you are so absurd there is no speaking with you.'

'Well, then, George, have you weighed well her station, and what people will say about it? Because it would be a pity to find it out afterwards when it is too late.'

'People may say what they like. The little thing is a lady in mind and manners, whether she is a grocer's niece or not; and I mean her to be my wife.'

‘If she will have you.’

‘You say she will.’

‘I imagine so.’

It was long a mystery to me what had attracted George to quiet little Phemie: for her style of beauty was not that which he had always professed to admire, and she had no brilliancy or cleverness to attract him. I believe, to this day, that it was pure force of contrast. The dark, proud, brilliant, imperious Barbara had served for a foil to show off the simple, quiet, delicately-tinted, golden-haired Phemie, and she had caught his heart ‘in the rebound’ from his first love.

I went in to Phemie, intending to propose to her that she should leave us, and go home, where she might be free for George’s wooing: but while I was hesitating how to express this plan in words which should not alarm her frightened timidity, she saved me the trouble by proposing it herself. ‘Do, you know, Cecy,’ she said, ‘I have been thinking that I ought to leave this place, and get another situation. I shall be so sorry to go—I have been so happy here—but then, you see, I could not be always meeting *him*

as I did before : and as I can't say yes, as he wishes me'—here came a little sob—'it would be much the best for me to go away, and for him to forget me.'

'Phemie, dear, you know you don't really wish that.'

'I ought to wish it,' she said, drying her eyes. 'I shall be able to wish it by-and-by, if it is right. I am not afraid of being beaten and left to do wrong in the long run, Cecy.' She gave a faint watery smile as she spoke, which I longed to comfort by telling her George's intentions. But I would not do so ; for I meant Phemie to stand perfectly clear before the world in general, so that, when the marriage was announced, no one should accuse her of under-hand dealings, or of having left the place in order that George might court her without obstacle.

Once I nearly betrayed myself. I had been thinking about my future plans, and talking to Phemie about Charley and the home he was to prepare for me in the back-woods, when I said, 'And you know, Phemie, I hope to come and live with you before then.'

'Live with me, Cecy? You know I must go

out again to get another situation. I can't stop at home—'

I turned off the conversation with an exclamation about my own stupidity, and the lame excuse that I had been thinking of something else. But once or twice that afternoon I saw Phemie watching me, and she blushed when she caught me looking at her.


Augusta was very angry when Phemie gave notice of leaving her in a month. She asked whether she had any reason: and Phemie cast down her eyes, and said, blushing, that she wished to be at home for a little while. Then Augusta offered to raise her salary if she would stay: but Phemie still refused; and at last my sister-in-law, in great wrath, told her that she had proved herself wicked and ungrateful, and would never come to any good. Phemie came to me, troubled but not unhappy: she had plenty of clear sense and mother-wit, and did not blame herself where she was not in fault. Augusta treated her as if she were in disgrace from that time until the day that she went, making me often very indignant; but my indignation was of little avail, and by-and-by the day came for Phemie's departure.

The bright face smiled through its tears as she looked back to me from the window of the railway carriage : and I could not help seeing with solicitude the weary air with which she leant back and closed her eyes as the train moved off. Poor little thing, she had had a hard conflict to fight with herself these last few weeks ; harder, perhaps, than she had ever known before : but now, I thought joyfully, it was at an end, for in a letter received that morning from George, he had communicated to me the grocer uncle's acceptance of his suit, and had also said that he had left a letter for Phemie, to be given her on her arrival at home. Meanwhile, I was not to speak of his intentions to James or Augusta : and it may easily be imagined that I was not over-anxious so to do.

Just at this time, when Phemie had gone, and there was no bright little face in the school-room to sympathize with my pain or rejoice in my joy—there came to me a heavier grief than any I had yet known. It seemed the harder to bear, because it was caused by a chain of mistakes and mishaps—trivial enough in themselves, but causing great sorrow for many years.

Our old friend, Mr Taylor, sometime curate of Estford, had been, through James's recommendation, appointed to a district church near us, and we saw a good deal of him ; and as both he and I were aware of each other's circumstances—for he knew how matters stood between me and Charley, and I knew that he was attached to Alice Baron—we had many subjects of common interest to speak about. He knew Charley slightly, and had a sister married and settled out in Canada, whose husband Charley looked upon as a near neighbour ; for the two houses were within five-and-twenty miles of one another.

Somehow, Augusta took it into her head that Mr Taylor wanted to marry me ; and not only so, but when a certain maiden aunt of Mr Taylor's came to stay with him, she indoctrinated her with the same view. It did not take me long to find out what sort of a person Miss Taylor was ; she was a good-natured, unintellectual body, and the most terrible gossip I ever encountered. I was very much disconcerted when I discovered that the ' nods and becks and wreathed smiles ' which Miss Taylor was always bestowing upon me were due, not to my own merits, but to an



imagined attachment between me and her nephew. I endeavoured to refute the idea by keeping myself entirely aloof from Mr Taylor; but the only result was a great scolding from Augusta, and the notion of a lovers' quarrel in Miss Taylor's mind. How could I ever have imagined that a foolish report which I was taking pains, here at the Beeches, to confute, should be carried by gossiping pens right across the ocean into the back-woods, and there sow trouble in the heart of the one man whom I would have done anything to have kept it from?

So it was, however. Charley happened to be staying at the house of Mrs Edwards, Mr Taylor's sister, when the English mail came in; they were soon busy reading their home letters, and Charley, after the manner of emigrants, asked for news. 'Oh,' replied Mrs Edwards, 'my aunt says that Frank is engaged, or all but engaged, to be married.'

'Indeed! May I ask the lady's name?'

'I think she is some sort of a cousin of yours. At least, her name is the same. A Miss Cecilia Hope, sister to Mr Hope of the Beeches, near Veriton. My aunt says she is a pretty little thing, very small, and

sings well : does that answer to the description of any cousin of yours ?'

Poor Charley ! The more he inquired the worse the case appeared ; and he rode all the way home that afternoon, and wrote a letter to George, who happened not to have written during the last month. That letter never reached its destination. George, immersed in his own affairs and busy courting Phemie, who had long before this been his affianced bride, hardly gave a thought to the cessation of the monthly letters, hitherto regular as clock-work : and I never knew what a gulf was opening under my feet until one November morning I received a letter from George, containing these words :

' DEAR CECY,

' I send you a most incomprehensible letter I have had from Charley. What can he mean by it ?
Love from Phemie.

' Your affectionate brother,

GEORGE HOPE.'

This was the enclosed letter.

‘DEAR GEORGE,

‘As I have received no contradiction from you of the report I mentioned in my last letter, I have given up all hope of its not being true. At the same time I must say that it would have been more like you to have written and told me one way or the other, and not leave me to find out the truth by chance. I do not blame her. She was only a child when she thought she loved me, too young to know her own mind : and I can well fancy what influence has been working upon her all this time. I hope, from the bottom of my heart, that she will be happy in her new life. Yet, at the same time, though I have no doubt that Taylor is worthy of her choice, or she would not have chosen him, I must say that he could not have loved her more or tried to make her happier than I would have done. I am going to leave this place, which is too much connected with thoughts of her to be any longer endurable to me. I shall try my luck in British Columbia, I expect. Don’t expect to hear from me, neither is it of much use your writing to me, as I shall be gone in a week, and know very little about my future plans.

‘Perhaps Cecy will be married when you get this letter. If so, do not mention me to her: if not, tell her that from the bottom of my heart I wish her every happiness and blessing. Good-bye.

‘Yours, &c.,

‘CHARLES RAYMOND HOPE.’

Separated for ever now! And all by a simple misconception, which would have been so easy to set right if that lost letter had only come to hand! Why had he not waited for a second answer? How had that foolish report about my engagement to Mr Taylor reached him? And then came the bitter heart-pain—Why had all these little, foolish mistakes, put together into one great error, been permitted to crush all our hopes and all our happiness?

I wore through that month of suffering as best I could. Phemie wrote me a tender little note of sympathy, George a letter abusing Charles’s stupidity: but I could not pour out my grief to any one personally, least of all to Augusta or James. The only way in which I could at all soothe my own pain was in throwing myself into the future prospects of George

and Phemie. Whether George's love to her were of the matter-of-fact or rapturous nature might be doubtful: there was no doubt about hers. She wrote to me delicately-written letters, expressive of her intense happiness, only troubled here and there with fears lest she should be too happy, and forget to look forward to the unseen things of the future, because the present was so very sweet. The only thing that troubled me was the dread lest she should spoil George, as a wife does who sinks into a mere reflection of her husband, with no ideas apart from his: and George, I knew well, was not the sort of man who could with impunity bear being set on a pedestal and worshipped. He rather wanted a wife who would be a 'partner' to him—as they used to say at Highthorpe—a true helpmeet in the fullest sense of the word. Barbara might have been this, could she have laid aside her love of power and imperiousness, and taken a little of Phemie's unselfishness, humility, and power of sympathy; but she had voluntarily abdicated her place in George's heart, and her throne was now filled by a truer woman — less highly born, less gifted, but as fair, and infinitely more loving.

XIV.

MISREPRESENTATIONS.

'She moves me not, or not removes, at least,
Affection's edge in me, were she as rough
As are the swelling Adriatic seas.'

TAMING OF THE SHREW.

GEORGE came down for a Sunday two or three weeks before Christmas. I saw by his face that he had something important to say to me. 'Cecy,' he said, as soon as he could get an opportunity, 'I am coming out with it to-morrow. What a fury Augusta will be in, won't she?'

'Have you settled when you are to be married?'

'We want to be married in Christmas week; and I want you somehow to manage and help us to furnish the house; for I don't trust Mrs Smith's taste. And then, Cecy, you are coming to live with us.'

'O yes, George, thank you.' And I heaved a long breath at the thought of the relief it would be to

give up the strain which had, especially of late, been weighing so heavily on my heart, and of the delight of being able to look and feel alike—not having always to wear a company face except when I was alone.

‘And have you chosen a house?’

‘Yes, a quaint little place on the south side of London, older by a good deal than most of those mushroom cockneyfied places. It is about the size for a doll, certainly, but it stands by itself in a tidy little garden, and is not overlooked. It goes by the name of Lilac Cottage. There is a tiny dining-room and a tiny drawing-room, and a very tiny kitchen; and a bed-room above each, and a good-sized garret at top. But, Cecy, you know we are going to live in a very small way: you won’t get six courses for your dinner, and no footman behind your chair.’

‘If you only knew how glad I shall be to get rid of it all.’

‘We only mean to keep one servant, so it will be like the old Highbury days. You will have to bring in afternoon tea when visitors come, Cecy:’ and we laughed; for it was an old joke against me

how I had had to set up as a grand lady to visitors, and how I had betrayed myself.

On Sunday evening, when Augusta and I had retired from the dinner-table, leaving James and George to finish their wine, George broached the subject. It would have been more diplomatic had he told his story to James after Augusta had gone to bed: but I suppose he wanted to get the weight of secrecy off his mind. I longed to hear what was going on; and the distant sound of voices which reached my ears through the double door made me still more anxious. Augusta, as usual on Sunday evenings, put her feet up on the sofa, drew a knitted crimson couvrette over them, and went to sleep.

At last I heard the sound of the opening of doors, and James came in, followed by George. He threw the door open with a bang which woke Augusta from her nap, and he looked flurried and indignant. 'Has Cecy told you of the most extraordinary affair, Augusta?' he said. 'I never heard of such a thing.'

'Cecy might know a thing for a long time without telling me,' Augusta replied querulously.

'Why, here's George tells me he means to go and

marry that little chit of a governess. I could not have believed him capable of such folly.'

'What! Miss Campbell!' said Augusta, with at least twenty notes of astonishment in her voice. 'He must be mad.'

'On the contrary, very sane, as you will confess some day,' said George, with imperturbable good humour.

'But Cecy! What has Cecy to do with it? You don't mean to say that this has been going on in my house, and she knew it?'

'So it seems,' said James.

'You mean, deceitful girl! And for you not to tell me—'

'As to going on in your house,' I said as quietly as I could, 'all I know is that George proposed to her, and that she refused him; and that her motive for leaving her situation was that she did not like to remain where they were likely to meet, when the duty which she thought she owed to you forbade her to give him any encouragement.'

'It is a pity that her sense of duty broke down so soon,' said Augusta with a sneer.

‘I beg your pardon,’ said George; ‘but I do not see that she was in any way bound to consult your wishes when she was no longer an inmate of your house, and when her own relations gave their consent to our marriage.’

‘That they would do readily enough. A fine catch for her. The designing little thing—to be so deep, with her baby face!’

‘Mrs Hope,’ said George, ‘that is not the way to speak of the lady who is to be my wife. You may abuse me as much as you like—though what concern of yours it is I don’t know—’

‘No concern of mine!’ cried Augusta, now in a perfect storm of temper; ‘then I should like to know whose concern it is. Do you hear him, James? As if it was no matter to me whom my connections married! And to bring my own nursery-governess into the family—a girl who helped to see after Rosalie’s clothes, and was no better than an upper servant—Well, all I can say is, I will hold no communication with her; and I will not allow any one in my family to do so either. You included, Cecy; mind that.’

‘There will be no need for your prohibition,’ said George, ‘for Cecy has always promised to live with me whenever I was married and could give her a home; and now I can claim her promise.’

‘Live with you indeed! Such being her taste and yours, it would be a pity not to follow it. Only let me remark one thing: that if Cecy chooses to hold with you, and to countenance this—this—person—she must choose between her and me. If she expects me to befriend her, she must never have any communication with Miss Campbell; and if she chooses her, she shall never have any communication with me. You have your choice, Cecy.’

‘I choose, then, Augusta,’ I said. ‘I see no reason to be ashamed of George’s choice, and I hold with him. I do not wish to quarrel with you or James; but I hold, and will hold with him.’

Augusta had not expected this, as it appeared; she burst into a torrent of wrath, calling me ungrateful, designing, and all sorts of epithets, which did not affect me much, as I was conscious of not deserving them. Then she came to a little pause; and suddenly a new idea seemed to flash upon her. ‘So this is the

reason you broke off his marriage with Barbara Talbot?' she said.

'I don't know what you mean,' said George. 'Barbara Talbot refused me, and Cecy certainly had nothing to do with it.'

'Don't tell me that, I know better. You wicked, scheming girl! to think that I have had you in my house so long, without knowing what you were—but I know you now.'

George turned to James. 'Do you intend to allow your wife to speak to Cecy in this way? I thought you were her legal protector—you protect her nicely, don't you?'

'I'm sure, George,' he said deprecatingly, 'I don't want to enter into it. I don't see why you shouldn't do what you like—Augusta is angry, you see, and does not mean all that she says.'

'But I do!' said Augusta; 'and if you do not see why George should not marry whom he likes, I do. There is such a thing as society; you may not know the customs of it, perhaps, but I can tell you that it is not the custom of society for a young man, who holds the position of a gentleman, to marry a

servant in his brother's family—for I look upon her as holding exactly the position of a servant—'

'I did not know that your servants sat down to meals with you,' said George in an under-tone.

Augusta did not stop for the interruption. 'And as I belong to society, I can only say that, as my duty to Rosalie and to the rank of life in which Providence has placed me, I refuse to hold any communication with that young person and with those who have encouraged and aided her designing schemes.'

'You are a little too hard,' began James, faintly. He only attracted the torrents of her indignation upon him.

'I believe, Mr Hope, that this house belongs to me, and not to you. Let me remind you that if it is uncomfortable to you to remain in it, you are quite at liberty to leave it.'

This retort, though James appeared to feel it cutting enough, did not strike me as much to the purpose. I thought it was as well to put an end to the scene, which had lasted long enough.

'Then, Augusta,' I said, 'I have taken my

choice. My home is henceforth with George and his wife.'

'And you shall come with me to-morrow, Cecy,' said George. 'I am not going to leave you here to be abused as you have been to-night. Pack up your things as quick as you can.'

'Yes, indeed,' said Augusta, 'it is a good thing that you have taken that resolution ; for I would not have any one in my house whose conduct has been such as yours in this matter.'

'Augusta,' I said, 'if you were not so angry, you would know how unjustifiable your words are. I am sorry that we don't part as friends.'

'The sorrow is all on your own side,' she began : but I would not heed her. I went up to James. 'James,' I said, 'I will say good-bye to you here, now ; I shall be gone before you are up in the morning. I don't like to leave you in this way, but there is no help for it. Don't give me up altogether ; let me hear of you now and then.'

Between his own bewilderment, and his nervous dread of his wife, James stammered, but made no answer. He kissed me heartily, however ; and I held

out my hand to Augusta, but she turned her back upon me. I had hardly reached my own room when George overtook me.

‘Well done, little Cecy,’ he said. ‘You stood as cool as a cucumber when that woman attacked you—quite a heroine, I declare!’ and I concluded my heroineship by a thorough good cry. ‘Come, now, it is all over; she won’t have the chance of slanging you again. But it *was* a scene to see her and you.’

‘She was so furious that I was obliged to be cool,’ I answered; ‘but I was not cool inwardly, I am sure.’

‘Well, can I help you pack, or get anything for you? Everything must be ready by eight to-morrow, so you will not have much time for sleep.’

I packed hard until three in the morning, and then, tired as I was, I opened my shutter upon the familiar fields and trees, swathed in mist and bathed in moonlight, like the night when King Arthur came to Almesbury to bid farewell to Guinevere. The second book of my life was ended, I thought: the first—the dear Highthorpe days—were growing faint and dim in the distance; and the last two years and half, un-

congenial though their atmosphere had been, had brought me greater joys and greater sorrows than any I had known before, and had made me old beyond my years. What, I mused within myself, would the next portion of my life bring forth.

The next morning was dark and foggy, and a faint steaming heat seemed to rise from the ground; it was one of those close winter days which take away one's energy almost as much as the summer dog-days. We left the house without any farewell except from the servants, and I felt sad enough as we drove off. But when we reached London, and I found myself useful and important, I felt quite a different creature from what I had done lately, in the forced and useless monotony of my life.

My first visit, of course, was to Phemie. I knocked at the door, and Mrs Smith opened it, and her honest kindly face beamed with joy when I told her my name.

'Bless you, miss, I've heard our Phemie talk of you over and over again, and how kind you always was to her. Come in and wait: she's only gone out across the street for me, and will be back directly.'

I made Mrs Smith promise not to disclose to Phemie the fact that I was there, as I wished to surprise her. I had not waited many minutes before a light step came along the passage, and a happy girlish voice sang out in clear tones, though rather weak—

‘ There trees for evermore bear fruit,
And evermore do spring ;
There evermore the angels sit,
And evermore do sing.’

The handle of the door turned, and the bright face appeared before me—how altered from the pale, weary girl who had said good-bye to me in the train. Love and happiness seemed to have altered Phemie’s very look. She looked taller and more womanly ; her golden hair was brushed back from her face in a more becoming fashion ; her eyes had gained depth, and the rose-tint on her cheek brightness. She stood still for one moment with uplifted hands, then, with a little joyful cry, she ran to me and kissed me over and over again, laughing and crying at once.

‘ Oh, Cecy dear, and I have never yet told you with my own lips how happy I am, and how kind every one is to me. I can’t think how George—I

call him George now, you know—I can't think how he ever came to think of me. Oh, you don't know what it is to me. I thought I was to go on all my life being a quiet humdrum little nursery-governess, and now this has come to me instead. Sometimes I think it can't be true, it must be a mistake ; sometimes I shut my eyes and try to think so, because of the pleasure it is to know it is all true—and then when I wake myself up !'

And here she remembered my less happy love-story, and asked me tenderly whether it gave me pain to hear her talk ; and when I assured her that it did not, she went on.

'I think nobody in the world ever was so happy as I am, Cecy. There does not seem to be one drawback to it all. I am so afraid I am not thankful enough—but I think I never could be thankful enough as long as I live. I mean to try and make George the best wife that ever was—I don't mean, you know, that I think that I am the least worthy of him, for I am not clever nor able to talk to him as you can—but all I can do I will. I mean to take such care of him, and whenever he even wishes for

anything I shall try and find it out and do it. I never mean you to be able to say that I did not make as good a wife as I could.'

And so she went on talking, sitting on the floor beside me and laying her head on my knees, looking up into my face with those childlike, trustful eyes, which always reminded me of the expression of the eyes of a pet canary I had had in my childhood at Highbury. Ah, when I think of that fair girl in her early glow of bridal happiness, and remember how afterwards the bright smile lost its brightness, and the cheeks their colour, and the voice its happy tone,—I can hardly write of her even now without tears, though the pain has long since been stilled, and the joy returned to her for ever.

Between the choosing of wall-papers, carpets, and furniture, my time was so fully occupied that I saw scarcely anything of Phemie, after that first day; and her time was almost equally filled, for every stitch in her modest trousseau was set by her or her aunt. Those young ladies who think nothing of a trousseau costing two hundred pounds would have turned up their aristocratic noses at poor Phemie's humble out-

fit, and the pleasure it afforded her. There was a consultation held over the wedding-dress. George wished her to wear a white silk dress and a veil, but Phemie, whose resources would only admit of one silk dress, persuaded him into letting her have her own way, and be married in a coloured dress, which would come in useful afterwards. As the wedding party was to consist of no one but Mr and Mrs Smith and me, it did not much matter; and so Phemie's dress was to be a deep blue silk, a straw bonnet trimmed with white, and a soft white Indian shawl, which had descended to me from my mother, and which I, by reason of my small stature, had never been able to wear.

A few days before the wedding, when I went into a shop for some accessory to the furniture, I encountered two faces I knew—Mrs Baron and Edith, who had come up to London for a day's shopping. I greeted them, but their manner was cold and constrained, and I was wondering what was the matter, when Mrs Baron said to me, 'I wanted to have a few words with you, Cecy; I will call upon you at your house this afternoon at three, if you will tell me the number.'

I had nothing to do but to comply, though, as I was very busy, I did not perhaps appreciate the honour. At the appointed time Mrs Baron and Edith drove up; Mrs Baron got out, but Edith remained in the carriage. I asked Mrs Baron whether Edith would not come in, but was answered in the negative. Mrs Baron's mouth was curved down into a most ominous expression of disapproval; and when she sat down at the table I wondered what was coming next.

She cleared her throat several times, and then observed, 'I suppose you can pretty well fancy, my dear Cecy, what I am come to say.'

I professed my entire ignorance.

'You know, my dear, that I have always taken a great interest in you, and done all I could for your good. I am the more sorry to find what your conduct has been, and how very deeply you have disappointed the expectations I had once formed about you.'

I replied that I was very sorry to hear it, but I did not know to what she alluded.

'Do not put on that hardened air,' said Mrs Baron, shaking her head. 'I fear you know too well.'

I allude to the ungrateful way in which you have repaid your excellent sister-in-law's kindness—in the first place your obstinacy in refusing to comply with her wishes in respect to the breaking off your engagement, as it was obviously your duty to do—'

'I beg your pardon,' I said; 'I entirely disagree with you there, and I do not feel called upon to discuss the question. According to my belief, I acted rightly.'

Mrs Baron shook her head and sighed. 'Then what can you say to the way in which you flirted with Mr Taylor, leading him on to suppose you were ready to marry him—'

'I deny doing so. I am quite ready to make Mr Taylor himself judge of that matter; and I know he will speak and clear me. There was never anything between us: I liked to talk to him about my cousin and Canada.' Here I was on the point of crying, if my pride had not prevented me.

'Cecy, Cecy, take care! These denials are no good,' said Mrs Baron. 'But I fear you cannot deny having acted very ill towards Mrs Hope in this last affair. For your own ends, you broke off an engage-

ment between your brother and an excellent young lady, in every way suitable to him : and encouraged a silly flirtation between him and a designing young person greatly his inferior in station, until it actually seems to be about to end in marriage. Did you think that this was likely to be for his happiness ? ’

‘ Mrs Baron,’ I said, rising, ‘ I cannot tell what Augusta may have told you about me ; but this I can tell you, that the charges you have brought against me are, one and all, utterly untrue. I never broke off any engagement between George and Barbara Talbot. What could have been my object for doing so ? ’

‘ That is not difficult to find out,’ said Mrs Baron. ‘ Mrs Hope says that, knowing your disposition, she did not allow you that amount of liberty which you liked : you had always looked forward to a home with George, and when you found that Miss Talbot would not be likely to prove a tool in your hands as you wished, you managed to separate them, and to bring on an engagement with a young person, who I fear—’ The rest of the sentence was filled up by a shake of Mrs Baron’s head, so ve-

hement that the bugles upon her bonnet clattered together.

As for me, I was dumbfounded by this string of inventions. It was something so new to find myself suddenly assailed by false accusations, that I could hardly believe it. When I could collect my senses, I begged Mrs Baron, as quietly as I could, though my voice trembled, to hear my account of the matter. She heard me through, though it was evident that she did not believe what I said: it was plain that she had prejudged my case.

‘Ah, Cecy,’ she said when I had done, ‘I had hoped that I might have found you penitent and willing to confess your fault: and in that case I would have done all I could to reconcile you to your excellent sister-in-law. But that hope is now at an end, and I am only glad that I did not let Edith come in with me. All intercourse between you and my daughters must henceforth cease. I am very sorry, for your good father’s sake; but on account of them I am convinced that it is best.’

So saying, she touched my hand icily, and swept down-stairs, while I sat on the hearth-rug before the

fire, and gave free vent to the tears I had before suppressed. I felt as if I had received a bodily blow, and its utter falsehood seemed to make it all the more heavy.

By-and-by, however, my senses returned to me ; and I felt that however cruel and unprovoked were the slanders against me, while they were not true they could do me no real harm. George came in while I was sitting there. ‘What? Saint Cecilia crying?’ he said ; and I explained about my afternoon’s visit from Mrs Baron. I never saw him so angry as when he heard the reports that Augusta had set afloat about me. He sat down at once and wrote to James, Augusta, and Mrs Baron, angry letters all three. James answered that he thought there must have been some mistake, and that he would contradict such a report whenever he heard it : Augusta returned hers unopened : and Mrs Baron, in a long wordy letter, maintained her opinion, in consequence of having received too great proof of my misdeeds from one who had every reason to know the truth, for her belief to be altered by the very vehemence and, she must say, irritable letter written in my

defence by my brother. There was nothing to be done but to take no notice, and go on as well as I could.

George and I both agreed that it was best to keep the whole affair from Phemie's notice. We did not want her to know that she had been maligned and evil-spoken of, and even as it happened, her wedding day was not to be one of unmixed happiness; for Mr Smith, who had been long ailing, was taken seriously ill on that day, and Mrs Smith was unable to leave him. So that, after all, I was the only person who accompanied them to the wedding.

It was a bright, clear frosty day, and, for a wonder, the air was free from fog. Even London was not gloomy, and could have contained nowhere a prettier sight than Phemie, in her simple bridal dress; a slight flush upon her cheek, and her down-dropt eyes and exquisitely-curved mouth full of happy thought. She was too little self-conscious to feel or look flurried: all her thoughts were upon the vows which she had to make, and the new life she was to enter upon. George showed by no means to such advantage. He was nervous, and had to be set right

by the clergyman when he was putting the ring upon Phemie's wrong finger ; and he also thought the service finished without the exhortation which ends with 'any amazement.' Then we adjourned to the vestry, and Phemie signed her 'Euphemia Campbell,' for the last time, in the pretty slanting hand which she always wrote ; and George scrawled his, and I made a blot.

After which we went back to the Smiths', and ate cake and drank wine. Then a cab was called, and the bridal couple went off to the Waterloo Station : they were to spend a few days at St Leonards' for their honeymoon. But before they went, Phemie found time to throw her arms round my neck, and say, 'You are my sister now, Cecy ! I always wanted a sister since Maggie died, and now I have you. Oh, I am so glad you are going to live with us always !'

XV.

LILAC COTTAGE.

‘It was a happy thing to sit
 So near, nor mar his reverie :
 She looked not for a part in it,
 So meek was she.
 ‘But it was solace for her eyes,
 And for her heart, that yearned to him,
 To watch apart in loving wise
 Those musings dim.’—JEAN INGELow.

ON New-year’s Eve the snow was lying deep upon the ground ; so deep that I could not run out to the gate to welcome George and Phemie, but had to await them at the door. ‘Here we are at last,’ said George’s cheery voice. ‘Come, Mrs Phemie, take possession of your own house ; do you want me to lift you over the threshold as they did the Roman brides?’

But the little feet tripped merrily over it before he had finished his speech. I led the way into the drawing-room—which, small as it was, looked very

attractive. Carpet, curtains, sofa, and table-cloth were crimson; the paper on the wall was of a soft, subdued tint which was pleasant and restful to the eye; and over the mantel-piece hung my present—a print of the Madonna del Cardellino. The lamp-light and fire-glow lit up the room cheerily, sparkling on the bright glass vase, filled with holly on the table, and reflected on the little cottage piano, and the book-case at the further end. The grand drawing-room at the Beeches had never had a tenth part of the comfort and cosiness of this little room.

Phemie stood rapt in admiration. ‘How lovely it is,’ she said; ‘I don’t think I ever saw a prettier room. Oh, Cecy dear, how much trouble you must have taken!’

‘It does her credit, does it not?’ said George. ‘But I hope there is something in the house to eat, Cecy; the cold sharpens one’s appetite awfully.’

So we adjourned to the tiny dining-room, where we ate plum-pudding which I had made in the morning, which was as much praised as my other efforts, and more successful than I had anticipated. We had plenty to talk about; I had the good news for Phemie

that her uncle was rather better, and I cannot say that I regretted that he was not perfectly well, as far as we were concerned ; as in that case, Mrs Smith would have been at Lilac Cottage with me, to welcome Phemie back ; and she, good woman, to tell the truth, was rather a bore.

Phemie, however, did not think so. ‘ If only uncle were well,’ she said, ‘ so that aunt could have been here, I should have not a single wish in the world.’

‘ I should, several,’ answered George ; ‘ and the first would be to tie up Augusta and Mrs Baron in a bag and throw them into the sea.’

‘ I never knew you were so cruel, George,’ said Phemie.

‘ You don’t know what cause I have, Phemie ; and I am not going to tell you—there ! Now you have another wish—you wish to know.’

‘ No,’ she said simply ; ‘ I don’t want to know anything you had rather not tell me. But I do wish one thing, though—I was wrong when I said I had none. I wish,’ she said, turning to me, ‘ to make

George and you so comfortable that neither of you will ever be sorry that he married me.'

'I am very sorry, now,' said George.

'I dare say; but you must be more sorry than that before I care. What would you wish, Cecy?'

'To have a pair of wings, or a glass that would answer all the questions I asked it, like Snowflakes in the fairy tale.'

'What would you ask it?'

I knew well, but I would not say.

Just at this moment appeared Naomi the maid; a staid, stiff, middle-aged female—with the letters newly arrived by the evening post. They were all for George, and the first one he opened, he said 'Hollo!'

'What's the matter?'

 For he looked considerably disconcerted, and indeed had muttered an expression more forcible than worthy of repetition.

'Here's old Brown going to give up at Midsummer to that Collis, of all people.'

'What? His son-in-law?'

‘Yes; he married Lucy Brown. Why, he’s half ruined himself since he married.’

‘Then will you have to leave?’

‘No; he’s made it a condition with Collis, it seems, to keep me on. But it will be a very different thing now. I wonder what possessed Dick Brown to turn up his nose at the business, and go off to India as he did!’

‘Do you dislike Mr Collis, then?’

‘He’s civil enough to me; but he has no more head for business than that cat. I should have thought old Brown would have known better: but he is getting old now, I suppose, and then he never could refuse anything to his dear Lucy. There is no fear, though, but what Collis will keep me on: I know more about the business than any man in the place except old Newton the clerk.’


Before long we had settled down in our new abode so completely that it seemed as if Lilac Cottage had been our home for years. I found myself in a more congenial atmosphere than had been mine ever since we had left Highbury. There was so much real occupation—things which must be

done, not which might be done or not according to the inclination of the moment—that, notwithstanding the great trouble which still haunted all my idle moments, I found my spirits recovering their tone, and I began to enter with interest and even with some degree of enjoyment into the little pleasures and schemes of our daily life.

The effect of the warning which James's conduct had given to George in the matter of extravagance was now plainly seen. He was careful almost to excess: all the household expenses were balanced weekly; and the difference of a penny was remarked upon. There was reason in this, certainly, for his whole income was such as most men would think it impossible to marry upon, and he wished to make some provision out of it for future emergencies. He took his full share of the privations imposed by narrowness of means, and gave up almost all society, except that of one or two special friends. Phemie and I did not miss much by this: she was as happy as a little bird in her own domain, and I had had too much of enforced gaiety not to be very thankful *for rest.*

The manner in which our days were spent was somewhat on this wise. We all breakfasted together at half-past seven, that George might be at the City by half-past eight: then Phemie and I adjourned to our own rooms, which we arranged ourselves—could Augusta have known it, she would have thought it a worthy retribution for my leaving her—then one or other of us went to the kitchen, where we made experiments in cookery, assisted by Soyer's book, and managed to produce many a little dainty unattainable by Naoini. There was a brisk rivalry between Phemie and me on these occasions, and I am sorry to say that before long she became a better cook than I was, notwithstanding the instruction I had received from old Dawson at Highthorpe. In the afternoon I often worked in the garden, which I had set my heart upon embellishing as much as possible, while Phemie worked and mended with her own exquisite neatness, until George came home about five. Then we all dined, and afterwards took a walk, caring little what the weather might be. There were some pleasant fields and lanes about Lilac Cottage, though they grew fewer and fewer every year, almost

every month, as more and more 'villas,' each with its square of garden and conservatory arose near us. Then, besides this, we had undertaken a district, and I had volunteered a singing-lesson to the school-children once a week, which offer the overworked clergyman's wife thankfully accepted. Now and then, when George had a spare afternoon, he would take us for a treat to the Crystal Palace, which we very much enjoyed ; or sometimes, when the weather was fine and clear, we went to a place we were very fond of, although I fear that our Cockney tastes may be very much despised—to that furzy knoll situated to the right of the village of Forest Hill, known to donkey-boys and others by the name of One-tree-Hill. I know nothing more striking, in its way, than to look down on the great black mass of London as it lies below you, one or two prominent objects, such as St Paul's, Westminster Abbey, and the Houses of Parliament, rising out of the mist which envelopes the rest ; you look over innumerable well-to-do suburban villas, the homes of the wealthy shopkeepers of London ; and little hidden hamlets, where railroads have not yet reached ; and rich fields of wheat and



barley, and market-gardens innumerable ; and long lines of railway, which the eye can trace in unbroken continuity for miles together ; and the valley of the Thames stretching westward, even as far as Kew and Windsor, and eastward to the far horizon where, by straining your eyes, you may discern the masts of the shipping of Deptford and Gravesend.

We were sitting here one beautiful summer afternoon, when one of us remarked that no place could better give a foreigner an idea of the wealth of England : since from hence we saw so many signs of the prosperity, and commerce, and riches of London, and none of the squalid misery which underlies it. Phemie's eyes grew grave, and she sighed.

‘ What were you thinking of ? ’ asked George.

‘ I was thinking how much pain and trouble, that we can hardly guess, lies underneath all that smoke there. I remember Aunt Smith telling me about some one she knew, who was actually starved to death. She had been in better circumstances, and lost her money, and was too proud to let any one know : and when she had spent her last penny, she just took to her bed and died. Only fancy that in London ! ’

‘Why do you think it would be worse in London?’

‘Because London always seems such a prison, if one is unhappy or ill. I never shall forget how I pined for the mountains, and the loch, and the free air, when first I came from Invermoran.’

I reminded her that she had once told me that she had been very happy in London.

‘So I was, afterwards,’ she said. ‘I could not help it, when Uncle and Aunt Smith, and everybody, were so kind to me. But when I came to Redscar, I found how much better I liked to be out of it.’

‘I hope you may never have to live there, since you dislike it so much,’ said George.

What would he have said could he have known the future?

By the time the summer came our little garden was looking very gay. There was a tiny grass plat in the middle, which I coaxed George to mow himself; and the borders were dazzling with bright common flowers—geraniums, calceolarias, and ‘purple king’ verbenas. There was a Bergamot pear-tree on one side which looked in May like a pile of snow: and when the blossoms had fallen, gave a delicious shade

to that side of the garden. Phemie was constantly, in the afternoon, to be found sitting there at her work.

So far, my description of our life reads like a little bit of Paradise—all perfect, without the serpent. But dearly as I loved both George and Phemie, I could not help seeing that even ‘Love in a cottage’ had its drawbacks to perfect bliss. There was a certain monotony about Phemie. If George had been able to introduce her into good, cultivated society, her mind and intellect might have expanded : but as it was, she seemed somehow to vegetate. She was always gentle, always contented, always making the same simple little innocent remarks : and never seemed to comprehend any idea which went deeper than the ordinary run of her thoughts. She was excellent in practical matters, and in all that required neatness and deftness of hand ; but all exercise of her intellectual powers seemed to be confined to reading her Bible. I fancied that I saw George now and then worried by her inability to comprehend him, and I thought perhaps that the powers of her mind were dormant, and had never been drawn out. I tried an experiment somewhat similar to David Copperfield’s upon


Dora, with much the same success. One night I engaged George in an argument on some subject of the day, and we had a warm discussion. I looked at Phemie to see if she were taking any interest in what we were saying, but I saw her placidly working as usual. When I was brushing my hair that night, she came into my room, and said, ‘Cecy, I am so glad that you are living with us, for you can talk about the things that interest George; and I am afraid he might find it dull if there were nobody to talk to but poor stupid me.’

‘But, Phemie,’ I said, ‘you could talk too, if you would only try; and George would like it so much. You are not really stupid.’

‘Yes, I am, indeed: I always was at school. I am stupid and humdrum, and I can do nothing well except just seeing after the house, and doing needlework, and perhaps taking care of little children. I am all the more glad that he has you to talk to.’

‘But I am not his wife, after all: and a man ought to talk to his wife about what interests him.’

‘Then he should not have married me, Cecy:’ and something like a tear glistened on the dewy eye-



lashes. 'I sometimes think he would have been better off without me,' she went on; 'he might have married somebody beautiful and rich and clever—somebody worthy of him. I always knew I was not; but when he chose me, what could I do?'

'Phemie,' I said, drawing the fair face down to me and kissing it, 'you shall not talk nonsense, or make yourself unhappy about nothing. Nobody is half as dear, and good, and pretty as you, in George's eyes and mine.'

So ended my attempt at improving the occasion, which was the first and last I ever made. I never spoke to her about her stupidity again.

It was when they had been married six or seven months that the first little hitch came in the smoothness of their daily course; it was Phemie's doing, though most unintentional on her part. On Sunday afternoons she and I stopped at home alternately, to let Naomi go to church, and George generally went for a walk. But one afternoon he heard, after he had left the house, that a celebrated preacher was to be heard at the church which we always attended: and he therefore betook himself to our pew, and was

astonished to find nobody there. On his return he found only me in the house; and we waited half-an-hour before Phemie came in, wondering what had become of her. When she did come in, however, she looked quiet and placid as usual; and George's inquiry, 'Where on earth have you been, Phemie?' seemed to startle her.

'I have been with Naomi to meeting,' she said quietly.

'Been to meeting?' we both exclaimed in tones expressive of various degrees of wonder.

'Yes,' she said; 'Naomi's sister goes there, and she was telling me the other day about the way they had worship: and I thought from what she said that it must be like ours used to be at Invermoran.'

'And how did you like it?' I asked, while George remained silent.

'I liked it very much. Mr Roberts, the minister, preached a beautiful sermon: it was so warm and earnest.'

'Roberts?' said George. 'I know the fellow you mean; I heard him speak at an open air preach-

ing once, and I never heard a fellow rant more. I can't admire your taste.'

'I am sorry you did not like him,' said Phemie, 'he seemed so anxious to do people good, and make them think about what was right.'

'Of course that atones for all defects of manner or doctrine, and for the absence of aspirates.'

'It does to me,' said Phemie, so simply that the shafts of George's sarcasm fell blunted.

'And how long have you turned Ranter, or Plymouth sister, or whatever you call yourself?'

'I don't know what you mean,' she said with deepening colour.

'How long have you sat under Mr Roberts?'

'I never went there before. Of course I should have told you if I had, George.'

'Then oblige me by never going there again.'

'Not if you wish me not, of course; but why? I liked it so much,' she said pleadingly.

'Because I belong to the Church of England, and wish my wife to do so too. And if you do mean to go running after strange preachers another time, give *us* notice beforehand.'

His tone brought tears to her eyes : it was so unlike any that he had used to her before ; but she said nothing, she only looked unusually grave all the evening. The entirely different aspect with which she and George regarded religion had never come so plainly before me till now. To her, it was a living fact constantly before her eyes, colouring all her actions, and rousing her sympathy whenever she saw it, so that she forgot all the minor differences which were so great to other people ; while to him, it was rather one of the proprieties of life, which he would on no account have neglected, but the neglect of which he would have looked upon rather as a solecism than a fault.

Perhaps there might have been more chance of his being in time brought to be one with her in this matter, had her head-belief and heart-belief been more alike than they were. But she rigidly held as matters of belief the Calvinist doctrines in which she had been brought up ; while her unreasoning, illogical mind could not perceive the difference between them and the truer and happier ideas which were really those which her heart believed and upon which she

acted. When I hear the tenets of any particular person condemned as harsh and repulsive, my experience of Phemie has taught me that it by no means follows that their religion is a harsh and repulsive one ; for there are many people who, like her, cannot perceive that the doctrine which they think that they believe would lead them in exactly the opposite course from the doctrine which they do believe, and on which they act.

Then there was another subject on which they differed—namely, good Mrs Smith's merits. Mr Smith died not long after Phemie's marriage, and his wife was at one time rather more at our house than George liked. She had been like a mother to Phemie, and Phemie loved her in return ; but she was apt to drop her aspirates, and to enlarge upon the maladies of her friends in general conversation, in a way which was rather trying, especially when she began her sentences with, 'We're all among our friends 'ere, so I don't mind saying—' Before long, it was observable that George either went out for a walk, or indulged in a solitary smoke in the dining-room, on the evenings on which Mrs Smith gave us her company. Phemie's

delicate tact quickly saw this, and she always tried to get her aunt to come and see her in the middle of the day, when George would be out.

One day, late in the autumn, Mrs Smith came to us as usual, and in the course of her visit she announced that she had had an invitation from a widower brother in Australia, to come and keep his house for him. Phemie gave an exclamation of dismay.

‘Yes, my dear, I can see it’ll be for the best, even for you. As it is, I can’t abear to think of them poor children with nobody to look after ’em; but even if it warn’t for them, I can see it don’t do for me to be coming here. I ain’t the sort of person your husband is used to—’

‘Oh, Aunt Smith!’

‘It’s true, Phemie, for all that. If you’d had some one of my sort—some honest tradesman, we’ll say, I won’t deny but what it might have been different; he’d ha’ put up with my homely ways, and not minded ’em. But then your husband is a gentleman born, and that makes a deal of difference.’

Phemie’s only answer was a burst of tears.

‘Come now, dear, I don’t blame neither you nor him. And I’m not going till I see you about again, and well,—not till next February, for certain. So don’t you cry ; I shall come back again some day, I dare say, and see you all again.’

‘What a blessing!’ was George’s observation to me when I told him of Mrs Smith’s proposed departure.

XVI.

THE FIRST PLEDGE.

'Forgiveness too, or e'er we part, from each
 As I do give it, so must I beseech :
 I owe all much, much more than I can pay.'—CLOUGH.

ONE cold foggy evening in November, I was standing at the gate watching for George. I had thrown a water-proof cloak over me to keep off the wet, which dripped from the leafless trees overhead ; but my mind was too full of the good news I had to communicate to care for damp or cold. I suppose I must have stayed there for some minutes, for George was later than usual, and I thought he never would come. At last the gaslight fell on his wet mackintosh and umbrella. 'George !' I called out, and he quickened his steps, and was beside me in a moment.

'All over. A girl, and both doing famously.'

'*There's a kiss for the news, then ; good girl to*

come and tell me. I wish it had been a boy ; but it does not matter much one way or another.'

When we got in, I presented to George the tiny red morsel of humanity which represented his daughter.

'Oh, I say, Cecy, don't give it to me ! I never could hold a thing like that ; I know I should drop it. What an awful little fright !' he added with some disgust, as he scrutinized the tiny shapeless features. 'I hope it will alter before it grows up,' he remarked to Mrs Smith.

'Bless you, Mr Hope, you may satisfy yourself of that,' she replied. 'Ugly in the cradle, pretty at the table, they say ; and she'll be every bit the image of her mamma.'

'There, George ! You will be satisfied with her if that prediction comes true.'

Just then a soft voice called from Phemie's room, 'Aunt, tell George to come in here.' And George accordingly entered the darkened room, where the sweet face looked out with such a radiant smile, and such a light of happiness in her eyes ! 'O George,' she murmured, as she took his hand in hers and fondled it, 'how thankful we ought to be for such a

dear little baby! I will try so hard to be a good mother to it: and you will teach it, so that it won't grow up as stupid and dull as I am.'

'Rubbish, Phemie; you are not stupid,' he said.

'Yes, I am; but I do try to do my best, indeed, George: and I will try more than ever now.'

But at this point in the conversation Mrs Smith interposed, with commands of silence and sleep for Phemie, and we withdrew, happy in the thought of the new little inmate of our household.

Phemie got on quickly, and at the end of a fortnight was on the drawing-room sofa, herself the prettiest ornament of that pretty little room. 'Cecy,' she said to me, 'Aunt Smith has heard of a nurse for baby, but really I don't see why we want a nurse. I don't know why I can't attend to her myself, and so save the expense of another servant.'

'It would be rather a tie to you, would it not?'

'Not more than I should like, I think. And besides, you know, George is always talking about economy, and making things go as far as possible; and I always said I would try to be an economical wife.'

Just then George came in, and the plan was proposed to him. He entered into it at once.

‘I did not like to propose it,’ he said; ‘I thought it would be hard on Phemie; but since she herself has thought of it, I am very glad. The keep and wages of another person would make a considerable difference in our income: and if we are to get on at all, we must be economical.’

‘And of course,’ I said, ‘I shall be able to help her, and take some of the things she has hitherto done.’

‘You are a good girl, Cecy,’ said George; ‘really sometimes I feel quite ashamed of having asked you to live with us. We make a complete slave of you.’

This was an unwonted kind of speech from George, but I replied to it, truly enough, that I would much sooner be busy every hour of the day, than undergo the enforced idleness and useless occupation of the Beeches.

‘By-the-by, Phemie,’ I said, ‘have you settled the baby’s name yet?’

‘I should like her to be called Charlotte, after Aunt Smith,’ she said.

‘No, no, for goodness’ sake!’ said George; ‘I don’t want to hurt your feelings, Phemie, but I must say I don’t want Mrs Smith’s name to be perpetuated in my family.’

Phemie’s face flushed for a moment, but she answered as gently as usual: ‘Shall we name her after Cecy, then?’

‘No, pray don’t,’ I said. ‘Two Cecys would clash, and if you called her Cecilia, she would certainly turn into a heroine of romance.’

‘I only protest against her being called Phemie,’ said George; ‘but I should like her to be called after you, too, Phemie. Can one shorten Euphemia in any other way?’

‘Oh, yes; you can call it Effie.’

‘Can we? That is a pretty short name: we will settle it so, then.’

Phemie performed well the duties which she had undertaken; and little Effie grew into a really pretty baby. She had her mother’s delicate features, and her downy hair, at present the palest flaxen, promised some time or other to darken to the golden of Phemie’s. In February good Mrs Smith sailed for

Australia ; and Phemie, though she evidently felt the parting greatly, brightened up before George, so that he should not find her engrossed by her own feelings when he wanted her to share his. I saw what an effort this was to her by the depression which came over her when we were alone ; but George did not. He congratulated himself extremely on having got rid of 'that old bore,' as he used to call Mrs Smith to me ; and he never took in what a loss she was to his wife. Because Phemie did not cry about her, or complain before him, he thought she did not care ; and she, on her part, had a touch of pride, and could not help feeling that if George had been rather more cordial and forbearing to the old lady she might have remained near them.

Husbands and wives are supposed to know each other's characters infallibly ; yet George certainly misunderstood Phemie's almost from the beginning, and Phemie had not the power of generalizing sufficiently to allow her to form any idea of George's as a whole, though with quick and ready tact she could discern and adapt herself to any mood he happened to be in. Her ideas of wifely duty were very strict, and she

carried them out to their utmost extent, as she did everything else which she thought right. She implicitly obeyed his slightest direction, now and then without sufficiently using her own reason as to its advisability, and thereby causing him to be vexed with her; and whenever he found fault with her, even unjustly, as now and then happened, she never would justify herself, as I always longed for her to do, but only expressed her penitence. So that George went away with even less opinion of her sense than he had before: and when she saw that he thought her stupid, even in instances where she was not so, she apparently acquiesced in the decision, and a certain timid nervousness now and then appeared in her manner towards him, instead of the bright fearlessness which used to be so pleasant to see.

It was about May, and the little garden was again beginning to put on its summer brightness, when one morning George received a letter which made him exclaim, ‘Hullo, Cecy, look sharp and concoct your best kickshaws; James will have luncheon here to-day.’

‘James! How did he get Augusta’s permission?’

‘Went without it. He might wait long enough if he waited for that. Listen to his letter :

“DEAR GEORGE,

“We are leaving England in a fortnight for several months, I cannot exactly say how long. I should not like to do so, however, without coming down to take one look at you and Cecy, and hearing both your and her assurance that by-gones are by-gones. So I will look in upon you at one o’clock to-morrow, hoping that you may manage to be at home.’”

‘And will you be able to manage it?’

‘O yes : I am much too useful to Collis not to do pretty much what I like in that way.’

After breakfast Phemie and I, after a long consultation, determined each of us to undertake the dish in which we most excelled : so we divided our forces, I taking baby while Phemie was cooking, and she doing the same by me ; and though we were in some trepidation as to the result, we thoroughly enjoyed the fun. *Then* I picked two nosegays, one to decorate the

drawing-room, the other the luncheon table: and then we went up to dress, and I superintended Phemie's toilet, making her array herself in her blue silk wedding-dress, which suited so well the porcelain-like fairness of her complexion, and the golden tint of her hair. Then, having seen that all, in house and garden, was in apple-pie order, we sat and waited for our visitor's arrival.

At the appointed time George and James entered together, having come down by the same train. James kissed me warmly, more warmly than I ever remembered his doing before; and shook hands cordially with Phemie, even taking the baby from her and kissing it, which astonished her not a little. He was perfectly astonished by Phemie's beauty, which, indeed, was far more striking now than it had been at the Beeches: her figure was taller and more dignified, and she had ripened into that beauty of early matronhood which has so much more mind and expression in it than the shy, hardly unfolded beauty of opening girlhood. He seemed pleased with everything he saw, from the gay flower-beds in the garden to our cookery, which he praised so highly before

hearing its history that we were obliged to confess that it was our doing, and to appropriate his pretty compliments to ourselves. When, after luncheon, he, George, and I went out into the garden, and Phemie remained with baby in the house, he said, 'Upon my word, George, I had no idea either that you had such a charming little place of your own, or that your wife was such a lovely creature. With her grace, and pretty simple manners, no one could imagine that her birth was not equal to yours.'

'She is as good as she is pretty,' said George, manifestly gratified.

'I was very much astonished, I own, when you first told me of your engagement: and I am afraid I was led on to say more than I ought to have said: you will forget it, won't you, old fellow?'

'All right. I knew it was Augusta's doing, not yours.'

'I cannot wonder at you now, and certainly not blame you; indeed, I rather envy you. I know too well what it is to—to—'

He left his sentence unfinished, but it was easy to fill up the end of it. He turned to me.

‘But my conscience is worst at ease with regard to you, Cecy. I thought at the time that I was doing the best for you, when I made Charles break off his engagement with you; but since that I have somehow come to doubt it. I suppose when one has trouble oneself one is more apt to see how one might have acted—’

‘What trouble?’

‘Nothing tangible—only the old story. I have not had very good health lately, and I should have been glad of companionship—such as you gave to my father, Cecy. Such as I might have had from you if I had behaved as I ought towards you. When one is ill and lonely one thinks of these things.’

I looked up at him, and it struck me that he did not look well: there were dark lines under his eyes, and he moved languidly; but what struck me more than all was the tone of depression with which he spoke, and the utter absence of that self-assertion which used to make him clash with George. I sincerely pitied him, poor fellow—ill and uncared for, left in loneliness and suffering, while his selfish wife was amusing herself.

‘I hope Italy will do you good,’ I said.

‘I don’t much fancy it will. I would sooner stop quiet at home ; I don’t feel as if I had either health or spirits for travelling. But I don’t suppose it much matters where I am : I am not much good anywhere. Ah, George, you don’t know how happy you are with a regular sphere of work, and a home to work for. How different I might have been if I had done the same !

This was the burden of what he repeated, over and over again. How different the realities of things are from their outsides ! Few would have thought that the master of the Beeches could envy, even as to sphere and position, the clerk of a tea-business, with a little suburban cottage within the ‘postal district !’ One brother, rolling in wealth, going abroad to enjoy himself in idleness as a rich ‘Anglais’ without any calls of duty ; the other working hard for a small salary on which to support his wife and family. Yet all the outside advantages on James’s side were more than counterbalanced by the fact that George held his rightful place as bread-winner of the family, and possessor of a husband’s undisputed authority

over his wife: James was a dependant upon his wife's fortune, and had never been able to assert his rights as head of the house. That home in which the natural relations of family life are distorted must be unhappy.

I went in presently to Phemie. 'I never saw any one so altered as your brother,' she said; 'he looked so quiet and so downcast. But I like him much better than ever I did before.'

'Poor fellow!' I said. 'How I wish he had never seen Augusta! she has been the bane of his life.'

'But perhaps that is the very reason why he is so altered. All this trouble may have led him to think as he would not have done without, and so have become a blessing.'

Perhaps it had. When he bid us good-bye, Phemie said in her pretty soft voice, 'I hope it won't be very long before you come back, and then you must come and see us again.' He answered, 'Thank you. I have enjoyed my visit and your kind hospitality exceedingly, but I am afraid it will be some time before I see you again. My wife talks of being away several months, but I dare say it will be even longer.'

He stooped down and kissed me. 'Good-bye, Cecy,' he said; 'you chose rightly for your own happiness when you left us.'

And so saying he passed out of the gate, and out of sight. I felt strangely heavy at heart as I saw him go. His evident depression had made me very sorry for him; but I did not think then that I had seen him for the last time. So it was, however.

It was about a month later that George received a letter from him, written from Como. In it he said — 'I am far from well, I am sorry to say. I believe it is some sort of fever that is hanging about me, and if a medical man were to come here I would apply to him; but Augusta thinks it is only my fancy, and likes stopping here better than going on to Florence, which I should like to do for medical advice. I do not find it very enlivening, as you may imagine, confined all day to the sitting-room of the hotel, while she, and a large party with whom she has made acquaintance, go off on long mountain expeditions; and any of your letters will be welcome. However, I ought not to complain of solitude, since if my illness is serious, as I sometimes suppose it is, it is a

good thing for me to have time to think of those things which I feel I have too much neglected all my life, and the want of which has made my life the unhappy wasted affair it is. There is a young clergyman of the name of Martin staying here, to whom I have been talking a good deal on this subject.'

This letter made us feel very anxious, though we tried to put down the evident tone of illness which it breathed to James's well-known nervousness about himself. However, when we had been trying to comfort ourselves in this way for two days, I suddenly asked George whether it would be very expensive for him to go to Como and see James, and he replied that he had been thinking of the same thing, and thought that it might be managed. But the next day there came, addressed to George, a letter in a strange hand, with an Italian post-mark; it was from the young clergyman James had mentioned in his last letter, and it conveyed to us the tidings that James had died the day before, of typhoid fever.

He had sunk very suddenly at the end, Mr Martin said. Mrs Hope was absent on a long mountain expedition of two or three days with some friends; she

had not thought her husband so ill, and the writer feared that it would be a great shock to her when she returned to Como. Mr Martin had sat up with him through the last night of his life: he had had, now and then, intervals of consciousness, when he seemed to be aware of his state and looking calmly forward to the future. Towards the morning he became altogether unconscious, and remained so until his death. This had thrown a great gloom over the English visitors at the hotel, who had none of them thought his illness more than passing ailment; but Mr Martin believed that Mr Hope himself had been aware of his state for some time.

So poor James was gone. Left alone by Augusta—indebted to the kindness of a chance stranger for nursing and attention in the last hours of his life—his desolate existence had passed away. Like many others, his life had been shallow and purposeless in the time when he should have been laying up store for future seasons; the seed sown had borne its natural fruit of unhappiness and vexation; but, happily for him, the very misery which was the consequence of his own early folly and weakness had led

him to better things in the end. Yet, looking at his whole life, it was a melancholy, blighted, imperfect one—he was not one of

‘The soldier-saints who, row on row,
Burn upward each to his point of bliss—
Since, the end of life being manifest,
He had burned his way thro’ the world to this.’

Happy for such as he—and for us all—that there is another world where repentant souls, who have failed in their work here, may try afresh hereafter under better auspices.

XVII.

SORROWFUL PRESENTIMENTS.

' And wilt thou leave me thus
 That hath loved thee so long,
 In wealth and woe among ?
 And is thy heart so strong
 As for to leave me thus ?
 Say nay ! say nay ! '—SIR T. WYAT.

SIX years passed by, tranquilly and quietly, and left little perceptible trace in our little household, except its increase in point of numbers. For now there were four little ones to play in the garden, and to be worked and mended for, and clothed and fed ; fairhaired little Effie was a womanly little maiden, competent to hold the baby, set out the tea-things, and even keep order among the younger ones—Georgie, and Sandy, and brown-eyed little Maggie, who was said to be like me. George had broadened perceptibly, and there were lines of care on his forehead and round his mouth, which showed

that providing for the wants of so many little ones was not the light work which perhaps he had fancied it would be when he had married Phemie. Phemie, too, had lost the pink and white, and the delicate radiance of her early beauty, though her features were as perfect, and her expression, if anything, sweeter than before. Slight changes, apparently, for so long a period as six years.

Yet, from some cause or other, I was not always quite at ease about our little household. I half fancied that perhaps we might be more changed than we thought; that the relations of the husband and wife were not quite so perfect as they had promised to be in that happy first year of marriage. His attention to his business seemed to rob him of some portion of his heart; she was no longer first and paramount; and with her the care of the children, constant occupation, and delicate health, left her less at leisure to be a pet and plaything when he came home. Then there were little vexations during the hours which he did spend at home. He worked hard, and wanted a little relaxation and change of scene now and then; but at *his marriage* he had given up all society, partly

on account of the expenses which he thought it would cause, and partly because he felt the inferiority of his wife's former social position. A woman may bear the effects of total want of society ; a man seldom does so without loss of some kind. George's mind became more and more concentrated on his business, and in his hours of leisure he sometimes showed himself moody and irritable—and the walls of Lilac Cottage were thin, and the rooms small, and the noises the children made were very audible from one part of the house to another. He made great sacrifices without a word, and worked harder and harder, with scarcely a day's holiday all the year, in order to support his family in honourable independence ; and there were many excuses for him, if he sometimes failed in temper and forbearance, or now and then gave utterance to discontented murmurs against his lot. The ' cares of this world ' have very long, close-clasping tendrils, and when they have choked down the light-heartedness of youth, it is only by dint of strong and vigorous efforts that they can be stayed from spreading further, and checking all

the noble aspirations of the mind, until at last the man becomes like a machine, going round and round in his groove without a thought beyond.

His irritability, however, never ruffled Phemie's temper. She always answered him with the gentlest and most submissive reply that it was possible to make; indeed, when he was thoroughly and unreasonably in the wrong, and she in the right, I used to long for her to say something which might convince him of that fact. But she never did: and if I made a remark on his ill-temper afterwards, she always stood up for him. One day George had scolded her for extravagance, because she had bought the children new frocks—a most unfounded charge, seeing that she was in the habit of stinting herself even of what any other person would have called necessities, in order to keep down the bills—and when I found her a little later sitting at her work, pale-faced and heavy-eyed, working at that ceaseless toil, the mending of the children's clothes, I made some remark on George's injustice.

'You must not say that, Cecy,' she said; 'it is

not fair upon him. He has a great many things to worry him, and how can a man know what things cost, or how bad the old ones were ?'

'But you might have told him so.'

'That would have been answering again,' said Phemie, with a smile.

'It would have been treating him like a reasonable being instead of a baby,' I said.

'What do you mean, Cecy ?' she said ; 'of course he is my husband, and may say anything he likes to me. He knows a great deal better than I do in everything—or nearly everything—and I dare say if I have not been extravagant in this, he may have noticed it in something else. George is sure to be right in the end—he may now and then make a little mistake, or say a thing rather more strongly than he means, but I know he is much wiser than I am, and, I believe, than anybody I ever saw.'

Yes, that was it. George was infallible in Phemie's eyes, and she never could see a fault in anything that he did. His was not a character, as I have before remarked, which could bear being set on a pedestal and worshipped : and many times

I thought how much better it would have been for him if Phemie could have opened her eyes to see that he did possess faults, since then she might have helped him to mend them. But her natural clearness of discernment seemed quite obscured by her love for him: she set up one standard of right for herself and the children, and another for him, and never even seemed to perceive their inconsistency. It did not seem to her possible that George could do wrong. Even when, during the whole of one summer, he left off going to church on Sunday, and sat in the garden smoking instead, she never remonstrated: she never even seemed to think that a little effort might have overcome his disinclination to move, and only bewailed that he was worked so hard that he could not take that hot sunny walk on Sunday mornings. I confess that as the church was only half a mile off, and as no heat ever kept Phemie herself away, notwithstanding her delicate health, I could not see the force of the distinction, more especially as George usually went for a walk of several miles on Sunday afternoons, and I never heard of the heat doing him *any harm*. But when I hinted this to

Phemie, she chose not to understand what I meant, and went on her way in her happy, blind adoration of her husband, and his infallibility.

George had been more than usually hard to please that summer : and one day when he returned home from his business, he looked as if he had something on his mind. He was rather cross with me because I refused to come out for a walk with him—our evening walks were now of very rare occurrence—and I could not leave all the children to worry Phemie, who had a headache. However, when he came in the children were in bed, and I was at leisure for his communication, whatever it might be.

‘ Well, Cecy,’ he began, ‘ I’ve been grinding and grinding on at the shop, and had no change for six years; and now I’ve got one with a vengeance. What should you say to my going off to China?’

‘ My dear George!’ I said in dismay.

‘ True, for you. I must be off next month. I have not told Phemie yet : I wish you would.’

This I refused to do, representing to him that if any one told her, he must : and I asked him what were the reasons which made it necessary.

‘Collis has mismanaged the whole affair, as I knew he would, when he undertook it. There is nothing for it but for one of us to go out and look about him in person. He ought to go, but he won’t : so I offered to go, on condition that he takes me into partnership when I come back. If I don’t make the whole thing look up then, call me what you like.’

‘But China ! Such a long time to be away—and so far !’

‘I should not be away more than a year. And the relief it will be to get a little change ! Grind, grind—rust, rust—till you end like a horse in a mill.’

‘Poor Phemie !’ I said, rather indignantly : he seemed to have so little consideration for her.

‘That is the worst of it,’ he said. ‘How do you suppose she will take it, Cecy ? She is not given to scenes. I daresay she will take it quietly enough ; but I dread telling her, rather.’

‘You need not dread a scene from her,’ I said. ‘It might break her heart and she would never tell you, for fear of spoiling one day’s pleasure for you.’

‘Rubbish about breaking hearts,’ he said. ‘I *should have thought*, Cecy, that at your age you

would not talk such gammon. She is a good little wife, and will miss me rather, I dare say : but as to all that nonsense—'

So little do some people value their most precious treasures.

I pondered long over this conversation. The more I thought of it, the less I liked it : it seemed so hard to leave poor Phemie, with her frail health, the burden of four tiny children, and by-and-by five. The only advantage I could see would be that George's means might be improved, and also it was probable that he might value his home blessings more after absence had taught him what they were worth.

But I would not take upon myself to tell Phemie, and for some days George put it off, as men do a domestic affair which they dread. At last, one afternoon after dinner, when I was taking care of the children in the garden, and the nursemaid was having her tea, he came to me as he was setting off for his customary walk. 'I have told her,' he said. 'She took it very quietly, as I said she would.' And with these words he was gone.

'Effie, dear,' I said to my eldest niece, smoothing

her short flaxen hair, 'will you see that the little boys don't get into mischief? I must go in to mamma.'

'I'll see, Aunt Cecy. Come, boys, we must all be good, because Aunt Cecy's going to be busy.'

I picked up little Maggie from the grass and entered the house. Phemie was sitting in a chair near the window: she was perfectly motionless and very pale; her work had fallen from her hands, and her arms hung down helplessly at her sides. There was a fixed, unnatural look about her face which frightened me. I knelt down by her side, and called her by every tender name I could think of, to break the spell which held her. I longed to see her cry, but her eyes were dry and tearless.

'George is going away, Cecy,' she said at last, in a low dreamy voice, not like her own.

'I know he is. But he will be back by this time next year: he is going for our good,' I went on, perhaps not keeping exactly to the truth as regarded my own view of matters; and by reiterating this several times in different words, I succeeded at last in breaking down her forced composure. She had a fit of sobbing which was almost hysterical, and which

left her so exhausted that I forced her to lie down on the sofa and be quiet. But she went on recurring to the subject—now and then blaming me for taking it so easily, then begging my pardon and crying again, that I hardly knew how to manage her. At last I happened to remark that it would be a complete change for George, and the rest from his work would be so good for him; and from that moment her demeanour altered. She put a restraint upon herself, and tried to look at his departure in a brighter light. ‘Mind you don’t tell George how silly I was,’ she said: ‘promise.’ So I had to promise, much against my will, for I would gladly have opened George’s eyes by any means in my power, to the undervalued devotion of the ‘good little wife,’ who he had thought would ‘miss him rather.’

Before him she strove her utmost to look brightly and to speak cheerily, but it was a hard strain. How hard, it was plain by the utter weariness and despondency of her attitude and her pale sad face, whenever he was not near. We both of us worked hard to get his outfit ready, but Phemie’s needle was often hidden from her eyes by the swimming tears

which she repressed so bravely before him. The last evening was very melancholy : the house was full of packing-cases and arrangements for his departure, and the three elder children were allowed to sit up later than usual, to share in the last meal he would have at home. Even his spirits, which had been high and merry until now, seemed to flag, and he leant back in his chair with Sandy on his knee, and Georgie and Effie leaning against him.

‘ Father,’ said little Georgie, ‘ shall I be a man when you come home again ? ’

‘ I hope not, old boy ; I should have to stay away a long time for that.’

‘ Will Effie be a woman then ? Mother said she would be a woman before I was a man.’

‘ No, no, Georgie,’ said Effie, with the superior wisdom of six years to four, ‘ father’s coming home in a year, you know : and then you will be five and I shall be seven.’

‘ But what will mother be when I am a man ? ’ asked Georgie, who had not attended much to Effie’s explanation ; ‘ she’s a woman now. What do grown-up people grow into ? ’

‘Angels,’ said wide-awake little Sandy, who always listened to everything his elders talked about, though he was only three years old. ‘Aunt Cecy said people grew into angels.’

The instruction which I gave my nephews was, it will be seen, not rigidly orthodox; but I wished I had not given it when Master Georgie remarked,

‘Then perhaps mother will be an angel when you come back, father.’

George did not answer, neither did I, but Phemie took the little fellow on her lap. ‘Georgie dear,’ she said, quietly and gravely, ‘father does not know how he will find mother, and Effie, and you, and Sandy when he comes back; but he hopes God will take care of us all, and that when he comes back he will find us just as we are now, only a year older and a year wiser and better.’

‘Then you won’t be an angel, mother?’ was Georgie’s last remark, uttered in a certain tone of disappointment.

George was to start very early the next morning, and all the household was up to see him go. While Phemie clung about him, not crying, but not able to

speak, I fetched the children down one by one for a last kiss. How pretty they looked in their little white night-gowns, all flushed and tumbled with sleep, much too young to understand that there was any cause for pain in the parting. All except Effie thought that being carried down-stairs in their night-gowns was the greatest fun in the world, and though her little face looked grave, I believe this was more from sympathy with her mother's sad look, than from any cause for grief which she could understand.

I kissed him at the door, leaving Phemie to accompany him to the gate and have her last words with him. It was a lovely October morning: the air was fresh and cool, the sun had only just risen, and the scarlet geraniums were as yet untouched by frost. Phemie had wished to accompany him to the station; but he had a great horror of farewells in public, and had said that he much preferred parting from her at home. The cab stood at the gate for his luggage. I saw him kiss Phemie, wave his hand to me and the children, and he was gone. But Phemie stood at the gate, resting her forehead upon it until long after the last sound of the wheels had died away,

and at last I went up to her, 'Phemie dear, you had better come in.'

She raised her face: it was white and sad, but very still. 'It is all over now,' she said; 'we have been very happy together.'

'And will be again. It is only a year—quite a little while, after all, Phemie.'

'No. You will call it a silly fancy, perhaps; but I feel somehow certain that we never shall be again as we have been. O George, George! O my darling!'

She did not cry—her eyes were still dry and tearless: but there were tears in her voice. 'Phemie,' I said, 'it is only that you have been working too hard, and all this has upset you: you are depressed and fanciful. Come in and lie down; you will feel better then.'

'Thank you,' she said, 'but I am not tired. Indeed, I do not mean to murmur; I have been very happy ever since I was married, and if it pleases God to take away my happiness, I can't complain. Only—only—it is very hard to bear!' and her voice quivered.

She bore up, without crying or giving way, for

about a week ; and then her strength suddenly failed—she was utterly prostrated, and quite unequal to any exertion. I wished that we had had a few more friends among the neighbours than we had, as some good-natured person might have relieved us of the children. But George had always discouraged our making acquaintances among the neighbours, under the excuse that we could not afford to give or receive entertainments, but his real reason was quite as much because his aristocratic tastes disliked our associating with the wives and daughters of London tradesmen ‘out of town.’ We managed as well as we could, however, with little Effie’s help. That child had the thought and helpfulness of a woman, with the mirth and gay spirits of her age ; and her little brothers always looked upon her as one who was to be minded, even though they rebelled now and then : so, though it was a time of great anxiety to me, and I wrote carefully worded letters to George, so as not to alarm him too much, yet in some degree to prepare him for what I feared,—we wore through it somehow.

At last, deep in the winter, a sickly little baby was born into the world. Phemie was dangerously ill for

some days ; but youth was on her side, and in time she rallied, and slowly, though gradually, recovered. I cannot describe what a relief it was to me : it almost seemed as if the happiness of my early youth was given back to me when our Phemie came down-stairs again—white and fragile, but with nothing the matter with her except weakness.

‘ I have thought of a name to give baby, Cecy,’ she said, as we sat at tea. ‘ George has not told me what he wanted her to be called ; you know he said in his last letter that I might call her what I like. What sort of name do you think he likes ? ’

‘ I don’t think he cares particularly, one way or the other. I don’t think he would like Sarah, or Eliza, or any name of that sort ; nor yet anything very remarkable, like the fashionable names now-a-days—Etheldreda or Muriel.’

‘ Do you think he would mind my calling her Patience ? ’

‘ No, I should not think so : but what a curious name to choose.’

‘ Do you dislike it ? ’

‘ No, I rather like it : but it is not the sort of name

which I should have thought you would have chosen ; it is so old-fashioned for your taste.'

'I should not have chosen it for any of the others,' she said ; 'but I like the Bible fashion of giving a name with a meaning about something which happened at the time. And I am sure I need patience, now, if any one ever did ; and perhaps, when any one spoke her name, it might make me remember, and try to be patient and submissive.'

'I hope George will be back before we learn to call her anything but Baby,' I said.

But she did not cheer up at the prospect, as I hoped she would ; she only sighed—the long, heavy sigh of a full heart.

'Phemie dear,' I said, kneeling down, and putting my arm round her waist, 'don't always look so much on the dark side. You know he has been away four months, and in six more we shall be thinking of his coming home. Think how pleasant it will be, and how proud you will be to show him his new little daughter—for I am sure she will be pretty ; she is just like Effie when she was a baby.'

'I know it all,' said Phemie ; 'but somehow,

Cecy, I have had a sort of feeling—ever since he left—that it won't be so, and that something terrible would happen. I don't think that our happy home life will ever go on again as it did. It may be only fancy—very likely, I should say; but, you know, I have heard of such presentiments coming true.'

'It is only because you have been so ill, and have not got up your strength yet, Phemie; it is only a fancy of yours, I know.'

But the echo of Phemie's fears somehow found an entrance into my own mind; and though I would not give way to them, nor allow to myself or Phemie that I felt them, still they saddened me.

Little Patience was christened two Sundays after. Mr. Warren, a friend of George's, who often came to see us and to inquire for the latest news of him, was her godfather, and presented her with a silver mug: but it was a sad christening with the father so far away. The clouds were low and threatening, and heavy with snow: and a piercing wind came cutting round every corner, chilling one through all the wraps it was possible to put on. The snow clouds were gathering over our home, too; but we did not know how soon they were to fall.

XVIII.

SEEMING FULFILMENTS.

‘On either shore, some
 Stand in grief loud or dumb,
 As the dreadful dread
 Grows certain though unsaid.
 For laughter there is weeping,
 And waking instead of sleeping,
 And a desperate sorrow
 Morrow after morrow.’—C. ROSSETTI.

THAT winter was a long and severe one—an alternation of frost, snow, and slow bitter thaw. All through February, and into March, this went on: and a heavy snow-fall took place on the night before the tenth of March, obliterating any distinction between garden-path and lawn, burying the poor little snowdrops which had ventured forth, and, where they still appeared, making them look pinched, brown, and miserable against its cruel white purity. The snow went on falling, and the children were standing at the window watching it.

‘Mother,’ said Effie, ‘here is a gentleman coming up the path. Oh, it is Mr Warren. What great holes his feet make!’

‘We ought to have the path swept,’ I said: and the children all joined in chorus to know whether they might sweep it with their little brooms.

‘What can Mr Warren be coming here so early for?’ said Phemie; and almost as she spoke, Naomi ushered him in. He looked anxious and uncomfortable, and evidently had something to say which he disliked to bring forward.

‘Have you heard anything of George this last day or two?’ he said at last with an effort.

‘No, we could not; there is no mail in,’ Phemie answered in a trembling voice. •

‘I asked because there is a disagreeable report in the *Times* this morning, which I thought might be a mistake. Only it comes by telegram, so I suppose it is later than your last news—’

‘A report about George!’ said Phemie, turning white to the lips, and clasping her hands.

‘Don’t alarm yourself—I hope there is no real cause for anxiety,’ he said; ‘I hope nothing worse

will come of it than that he will be detained for a month or two, and put to some little inconvenience.'

'But what is it?'

'You know that the part of China where he was going to has been for some time in a very disturbed state? Well, it seems that he and a Captain Arbuthnot went together for a day's expedition into the interior—never dreaming of danger, I dare say: and somehow they fell in with a troop of the rebels, and were taken prisoner, or detained, or something. Don't be alarmed about it, Mrs Hope: they are sure to be restored before long,' he added, looking at Phemie's colourless face.

'Of course the Government will demand them,' I said.

'Of course: and the Chinese are by far too much afraid of us not to do what we tell them. This is the telegram:' and he read out an official notice of the facts he had just told us. In a few minutes he took his leave. I followed him to the door to make one or two inquiries.

'I am afraid this may make a serious difference to Collis,' he said. 'His affairs have been in a bad

state for some time : but if George's negotiation had been successful, he might have tided over this. When I went to him to ask if he had heard anything about George, and told him of this, he was evidently very much distressed, but more, as it seemed to me, on his own account than George's.'

'But George's salary is safe, I suppose, whatever happens.'

'I hope so : ' but he did not speak heartily, and a second vague fear began to enter my mind.

'Do you mean that there is any chance of the business failing altogether?'

'I hope not ; but I half fear it. However, rely upon me, whatever I can do for you, I will. At least I will come and tell you whenever I hear anything.'

'Thank you very much. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye.' He held my hand longer than I thought he need have done, and then he left me.

I returned to Phemie : she was in just the same sort of trance-like stupor which had come upon her when she first heard that George was going to leave her. If she only would have cried, I should have felt

more at ease about her; but she was dry-eyed and tearless, and gave no sign of her grief except now and then an occasional deep, heavy sigh, and almost unbroken silence. Her trouble was too great for words or tears.

Telegram after telegram arrived, and only brought 'no news of Arbuthnot and Hope: they are reported to have been carried into the interior.' The Government made inquiries, but, as it seemed, to no purpose: for as it was a detachment of the rebels who had taken them, the recognized authorities ignored the whole subject. The sickness of hope deferred was preying on us both, and I did not dare to look forward to the future: I only feared lest Phemie's weakened health should break down entirely under the strain of anxiety. The spring came, late and cold, and slowly passed into the full beauty of summer: but the cloud was not lifted off our hearts. At last, when the autumn winds were shaking down the Bergamot pears from the tree—they ought to have been gathered before, but there was no hand to gather them now—there came a day when Mr Warren *came to us*, and his face at once told us the news

which he had in store for us. In the paper which he brought was the following intelligence :—

‘The fate of Mr Hope and Captain Arbuthnot has at length been ascertained. They both died in prison at ’—some unpronounceable Chinese name,—‘and a ring belonging to Arbuthnot, and a pocket-book of poor Hope’s, have been forwarded hither from that place. No details are known : but it is supposed that they died in consequence of the fearful treatment which Chinese prisoners receive’—

We needed to read no more. Our last hope was gone. Mr Warren left us : and then Phemie, with her white face and dry tearless eyes, rose from her chair and came to where I sat stunned, as if turned into stone. She tried to speak, but her voice would not come ; and with a hoarse gasp she fell against me in a swoon. The sight of her state roused me from my stupor. I somehow got her to the sofa, and laid her there, and we did all in our power to bring her back to consciousness, but it was a long, long time before her senses returned. She only recovered from one faint to go off into another ; and I wondered in a *strange*, half-dreaming way, whether the shock had

killed her; whether her soul was so transfused with her husband's that she could not stay on earth after he had left it. When at last she seemed rather better, she lay upon the sofa with her eyes closed—not asleep, but too much exhausted to speak or think.

It was little Patience's cry which roused her at last. 'Give her to me, Cecy,' she said feebly: and when I laid the baby by her upon the couch, I saw that she had found the relief of tears. 'My little fatherless baby!' she murmured, 'she will never know her father, and he will never see her. Oh, my bairns, you will never have any one to take care of you now!'

'God will take all the more care of them all because they have no father,' I said, trying to comfort her through my own grief. It was seldom that Phemie needed my comfort—she was usually the strongest in faith and trust of the two; but the shock had prostrated her utterly, both in body and mind.

'I know He will,' she answered wearily; 'but somehow I seem not to be able to think of anything just now, except that my George is taken from me.'

Oh, why, why did he go?' and she buried her face in her pillow and sobbed those long-drawn, choking sobs which exhaust but not relieve. Phemie's grief was far beyond the reach of any comfort which it was in my power to give.

I believe that, had Phemie at this time lacked the support which her earnest faith and habitual self-command gave her, body or mind must have sunk under the shock. She had not the power of thinking or reasoning, nor talents for shining in society, but she had the power of infinitely loving; and when he on whom she poured out all the love of her nature was taken from her, the effect was far greater than it would have been on most people. Some women are like wildrose bushes, which entwine themselves with the hedge in which they grow, but yet if the hedge is taken away they still can support themselves, stand against the wind, and put out fresh blossoms: but Phemie was like the briony, which clings with all its tendrils and climbing stalks to its support, and when its support is gone, lies powerless and prostrate on the ground, the spiral tendrils curving in vain to find *a hold*, and the unheeded dust filling its striped green

flowers. Phemie rallied her strength both of body and mind after a certain time, but she never looked the same after that October morning. The waters had gone too deeply over her soul not to leave behind an indelible trace; and the golden hair was streaked with silver now, though she was not yet seven-and-twenty.

When we told the children what had happened, Effie understood at once. Georgie said, 'But, Aunt Cecy, you *said* he would come back when the pears were ripe, and now they are all dropping off the tree. He ought to come now.'

Poor little fatherless boy! The pears might blossom and ripen year after year until the old tree was no longer able to put forth its flowers, and the generations which had played under its shade had passed away; but the old days would never come back to us again.

'If we had only known—if we could have been by and nursed him, and heard his last words, and known how he died!' was the constant cry in both our hearts—the cry which has risen so often from women's lips, from the time of Andromache till now;

but it was all in vain. The only comfort was in submission, in acknowledging that our ways were not as His ways, and that our hearts were too dull to understand, and our eyes too blind to see. And gradually the utter blackness which had overspread our sky gave place to a dull uniform gray: the first sharpness of our grief was passed, and time had begun its blessed task of healing. Just then, when the dark November days were on us again, another blow came upon us which, in some measure, neutralized the effect of the first; for it roused us both, and forced us to use our energies, and to work.

Mr Collis—to whom we naturally looked in some measure for our support, since George had met his fate in his employment—became bankrupt, and was obliged to go abroad to escape his creditors. In consequence, we two women and five children were thrown adrift, and almost penniless, upon the world: for Phemie had nothing; George had spent most of the small amount he had of his own on furnishing the house when he married, and the united sum which remained to us to live upon, of his and mine, was not quite fifty pounds a year.

I dreaded the effect of the news upon Phemie, but I alarmed myself needlessly. The need for exertion braced her energy, and made her more like herself than she had been ever since she had heard of George's fate. We had something now to think of besides our own desolation, and I felt that I, at least, must try to do something for my own support. Plan after plan we revolved in our own minds as we sat by the fire. Mr Warren, our prime counsellor and only friend, had utterly scouted Phemie's first idea—that we should take a house and let lodgings—showing her how impracticable it was. I had thought of going out as governess; but I could not bear to leave Phemie alone; and, besides, my acquirements, singing, French with an indifferent pronunciation, a little Greek, and a smattering of general information, seemed so little in comparison with the requirements of the present day, that I felt my inferiority in that line an insuperable bar.

‘There must be some way in which we could earn money,’ said Phemie. ‘I might take in needlework, perhaps.’

‘No, Phemie, that you shall not do. You will

have neither the health nor the time for anything more than to attend to those five children. I must be the bread-winner. I know ! Mr Winter, my old singing-master, is in town : I will apply to him to recommend me as a teacher of singing. I have got a voice at least, and I might make something by that. Suppose I were to go upon the stage, now ! I might make heaps of money by that,' and I attempted a laugh.

'No, no, Cecy,' said Phemie, 'at least you will never do that.'

'I did not mean it, of course, dear. I only said it in fun.'

Fun ! how dreary the merry old familiar word sounded when all the substance of it was gone out of our hearts ! I had been keeping up till now, when the echo of my own words utterly upset me—there was such a hollow empty ring in it ; and all of a sudden it came before me how, when we were children, George used to come and look for me, calling out, 'Come on, Cecy ! here's such a jolly lark—such fun !' and the recollection quite overcame me. I hid my

face on her shoulder and cried, but she did not cry at all : ' with long use her tears were dry.'

' Cecy, dear, don't cry,' she said, turning comforter in her turn ; ' we shall get on somehow, I know. God has taken care of us so far, and helped us to bear what He has sent, and I am sure He will not fail us now. Only we must look forward to what it is likely to be, and try to bear it ; and then if we make up our minds to it, half the hardship of it will be gone. As for me, it does not much matter ; after what has come to me the last month, I do not think I should feel anything else—nothing in the way of poverty, certainly, as long as you and the children were left me.'

Her voice was calm and steady, and her eyes were fixed on the far-away primrose evening sky, though as if she did not see it. She went on in the same tone.

' We must expect to have a hard struggle for living, and to do without even the little comforts we have always had, and we must be content to see the children what people would call lowered in life—

perhaps, when we leave them, we shall leave them to struggle like us. Are you afraid to look forward to this, Cecy? I should have been once, but I am not now. As I said, I don't think I can ever fear anything again.'

Mr Warren came over—he often came now—to assist in winding up our affairs. His constant kindness had been a great comfort to us, and I said something about it to him, but I was not prepared for what followed. He reddened, stammered, and before I fully understood what he was about, he was making me an offer of marriage.

'Mr Warren, I am very sorry, I never thought that you were thinking of this. It is impossible; I cannot leave my sister and the children, if there were no other reason.'

'Indeed,' he began eagerly, 'that need not weigh upon your mind. I would undertake to see that they were in no need; you should do whatever you liked with them—'

I replied again, that it was impossible, but perhaps my manner was not so decided as my words, because I was so sorry for him—and I was angry

with myself, because, absorbed in my own affairs, I had not noticed his manner to me, and spared him the pain of a refusal.

‘At least,’ he said, ‘may I ask you not to answer me hastily? Take till to-morrow to think about it. I must return here then : and oh, Miss Hope, if you only knew how my happiness depends upon your answer ! And I could provide so easily for Mrs Hope and the children : I should be glad to do it !’

So he left me in bewilderment at his proposal, and utterly unable, at the moment, to get clear before my eyes anything except that here was a way of provision for Phemie and the children. I did not tell Phemie, but after she was gone to bed I sat up in the sitting-room on the rug before the fire, to think it over. The room, once so pretty, was all dismantled now, and half bare : we were to move to London in a few days. On the one hand was a good honest man who loved me, competence for myself, and provision for the children ; on the other, a life of discomfort, and privation, and hard toil for the barest necessities of life. And the only reason why I felt *myself* obliged to refuse the former, and to choose the

latter, was that I now felt that the old love, buried out of sight for so long, was not yet dead ; and as I sat there that night, I felt it stir in its grave. No, I could not marry any man except one—Charles Hope.

Yet it was nearly eight years since we had parted, and for the last seven I had heard nothing of him. He might be dead, it was more than probable that he might be married. Probably I should never see his face again: he had most likely settled down in Canada, or Columbia, or the United States, and would never return to England. Yet I still shrank from the thought of accepting another man's love. I thought of the dark wet beach at Redscar, where Charley had said words to me which changed the damp and cold shore into a palace of delight, and the echo of which had never yet passed from my heart. I thought of that happy summer-time, and the utter dreariness of my present life came over me—father, brothers, lover, all gone!—and I sank down upon the ground in my bitter pain, and sobbed, secure that there was no one to hear me. It was one of those moments when wave after wave of trouble seems to be closing over the soul, yet without

bringing insensibility, which seem to be able to age one before one's time, and to do in a short space the work of years.

Suddenly I sat up. 'I will do it!' I said to myself. 'I will sacrifice myself for the others. Mr Warren shall never know it, nor any one else; I will marry him and make him a good wife. Charley will never come back; he broke off our engagement himself. It will only be for a lifetime, too, after all,' I said; 'an end will come some time or other, and then it will be all the same. But is it right? Right,' I replied to myself scornfully, 'is there any right or wrong at all? Some people say one should do whatever one dislikes the most when it is doubtful what to do: if it is, I can marry Mr Warren with a safe conscience.'

At this point in my meditations Phemie came in. She wore her white dressing-gown, and her golden hair was rippling down her back; she had a little lamp in her hand, and looked like my old childish ideal of an angel. Her sweet, grave, quiet face helped to carry out the impression; I had often thought her very like one of Francia's angels in the

National Gallery, but now she was more like than ever. A sudden inspiration came into my mind : I would tell her, and abide by her decision. Whatever she told me to do could not be wrong.

‘Cecy, dear,’ she said, ‘do come to bed. Do you know it is nearly one o’clock?’ Then, as she saw my wild look—for I had let down my hair, and it was all loose and tangled, and my eyes were red and swollen,—she said, ‘Are you ill, dear? What is the matter?’

‘Nothing—at least, I am not ill. I don’t know what I ought to do, and the more I think about it the less I know what is right. I will tell you, and you shall judge for me.’

‘I will hear what it is presently, dearest; but I can’t stay with you here, for baby is waking. Come and get into bed, and then I can hear what it is.’

I came into Phemie’s room in a few moments. How white and peaceful everything looked—the shaded night-light, the sleeping baby, and Phemie as she sat up in bed holding it in her arms. All the wild tempest in my heart seemed quieted by only looking upon her: the simple, quiet woman—even

now scarcely more than a girl—who was as far above me in simple faith and goodness as if she were a saint already.

‘Now, dear Cecy,’ she said, as she laid baby Patience in her cot, ‘lie down and let us talk. I have asked God to help me to judge rightly for you.’

‘I have had an offer of marriage from Mr Warren.’

‘I fancied it must be so.’

‘He offered to marry me and provide for you and the children. He is a good, generous man.’

‘He is, indeed.’

‘There is no reason against it but one. I love Charley still; Charley, that I have not heard of for years and years. He may be married or dead by this time. Phemie, Phemie!’ I sobbed, turning my face to the pillow, ‘tell me what is right, for I don’t know it myself.’

‘Do exactly what you would do if the children and I were not mixed up in the question; what you would do if—if George were here.’

I knew well enough that I should have refused him *then*. ‘But, Phemie, I must consider you and

the children ; don't judge hastily. Remember what you will have to bear, and they too ; think of what would happen if they were ill, and you could not get them proper food. Think how poorly you often are yourself.'

'But, Cecy dear, that has nothing to do with it. If you had loved him, I should have been very, very glad for you to accept him. But you love another man, and you don't love him ; therefore it is plain that you ought to refuse him. We must not do evil that good may come.'

'O Phemie, how plainly you see it ! But are you sure ? Have you really realized what we shall have to go through ?'

'Wait and trust,' said Phemie. 'We will do our best, and leave the rest to God. If it pleases Him to give us suffering, he will help us to bear it—as it was with me last October, I must have died then if it had not been for that : and I am sure he will not fail us now,—only you must not accept Mr Warren.'

'I promised to abide by your opinion, Phemie, and I will.' So saying, I kissed her, and soon

slept, wearied out by the excitement of the last few hours.

Mr Warren came earlier than usual the next day, to know his fate. So truly good and kind he was, that it went to my heart to inflict so much pain as I had to do : but as it was useless to put off the evil day, I told him that I was obliged to refuse him.

‘ Can you give me no hope ? ’ he said. ‘ At some future day, perhaps—’

Then I hinted at the real state of the case, though without explaining all the circumstances of my melancholy love-story. He said no more ; and soon afterwards he left London, and our intercourse ceased.

Then followed a very trying time. We had to part both with the young nursemaid and old Naomi, who had been with us ever since we came to Lilac Cottage. Then, little by little, most of the pretty familiar furniture was sold : there was room for very little in the small lodgings to which we were going. Day by day, the cottage that used to look so bright and pleasant was dismantled of something fresh, until at last only the bare walls were left. Until these last

days came, we had not known how many memories hung about every nook and corner of little suburban house. Here it was that George when he held his eldest little daughter in his arms the first time; here Effie had taken her first walk alone, or Georgie had climbed, or Maggie had measured, or Sandy made some wise speech which astonished us all. Then in this corner of the garden grew a rose which George had been accustomed to pick to put in his button-hole when he went to his business; and in that were the children's games and there was the seat under the pear-tree where we used to hear the children say their lessons in summer. Even the children seemed to share the sadness which we felt at leaving our pretty home and when at last the day came on which we were to go to London, they stood at the gate with hands full of crocuses and daffodils, looking ungratefully at the grave.

‘It will be long enough before they get any flowers,’ I said sadly to Phemie, as I thought of the little faces peaking and pining in the close London

She did not answer: I think she would have broken down altogether if she had tried to do so. Silently and sadly we left our pleasant little home for ever. The pear-tree would blossom for us in vain, and the carefully tended roses blow.

I have never seen Lilac Cottage since. I suppose that other children may play there as merrily as ours, and other people may make it their home, and love it as we did; but our name is already forgotten there, and our place knows us no more.

XIX.

HONEST LABOUR.

‘ Then he who patiently Want’s burden bears
 No burden bears, but is a king, a king !
 Work apace, apace, apace, apace :
 Honest labour wears a lovely face.
 Then hey nonny nonny, hey nonny nonny ! ’ —DEKKER.

OUR first view of our lodgings, when we arrived there, was not cheering. We had to go up so many pairs of stairs that Phemie had to stop to recover her breath several times ; and when we reached them, the spring sun was streaming through two closed windows, thick with the winter’s smoke and fog, and the room smelt close and musty. The furniture stood about in disarray, waiting for us to arrange it ; and there was altogether a strange forlorn look about it all. Yet it had its advantages : it did not look into the street, but on a variety of roofs and chimneys ; and the very height which we had to mount gave us purer air for our trouble.

Our first task was to put the things into order.

Then I took the children out for a little walk, to relieve Phemie, and when they had their tea and were gone to bed, we talked about our future plans. My idea was, to go in person to Mr Winter, my old singing-master, and ask his advice; and the next morning I arrayed myself in my Sunday black silk, and set off to do so.

It was a long way from our quiet little street to the fashionable West End house where Mr Winter lived; and I felt both tired and nervous when at last I arrived at his door. I dreaded very much to hear that he was out, but, happily for me, I only heard that he was engaged, and would soon be at liberty. After about half an hour had elapsed, he came into the room where I was waiting, looking just the same as he had done when he gave me lessons at Redscar; a short, bald little man, with a kindly face and a blunt manner, whom no one would have suspected of the enthusiasm for his art which he really possessed. He looked at me as if he thought he ought to know me, but did not. 'I am afraid you have forgotten me,' I said: 'I was an old Redscar pupil of yours; my name is Cecilia Hope.'

‘No, indeed I have not, now that you tell me your name,’ he said; ‘I always remember you as one of my pupils who did me most credit. I hope you are come to say that you want some more lessons.’

‘Indeed, I wish I was; but I came to ask whether you could help me in another way;’ and I explained to him our straitened circumstances, and told him how I wished to get some pupils.

‘Ah, I see,’ he said, drumming a tune with his fingers on the table, and looking at the fire. ‘Wife and five children—there always are five children in these cases—and a little thing like you to think of supporting them all!’ Then, turning suddenly to me,—‘But what has happened to your rich relations—why don’t they come forward?’

I explained to him, as far as I could, the facts of this history,—James’s death, Augusta’s treatment of me, and her refusal to hold any intercourse with me if I went to live with Phemie; and said that if I could get pupils, I should infinitely prefer depending upon my own exertions to asking any one for help.

‘Well, let us see what you can do.’ He opened

the piano, and placed the 'Messiah' on the music-stand; and then struck up the opening chords of 'O thou that tellest.' It was happy for me that I had always kept up my practising, for his quick ear was on the alert for any flat note or thin tone: but I suppose that my singing met with his approbation, for he said, 'Very well! very well indeed. Much better than I expected. You have practised diligently, I see, and have not let your voice get rusty. Now try something else, "*Voi che sapete*.'" And I sang song after song with him; and at last he said, 'I should not mind recommending you,—at least as far as your singing goes; whether you can teach is a different matter; but that you will learn by experience. Now, what do you want? I know a school at Brighton where they want a resident singing-mistress; you might do for that.

'I should be very glad if there were only myself to be considered. But if it were possible to give lessons by the day I should very much prefer it: my sister-in-law has delicate health, and I do not like to leave her.'

‘Hum,’ he said. ‘Well, Miss Hope, I’ll see what I can do for you. Call in a week—or, stay, where are you lodging?’

I gave him our address.

‘Ah, a long way off. Well, I’ll save you the walk, and write as soon as I hear of anything. Wait a bit before you go, and Madame Winter shall get you a glass of wine.’

So he introduced to me his wife, a plump, fair-haired little German woman, who had herself been a famous pianiste before her marriage; and she displayed to me her only child,—a quaint little girl in long frocks, about Effie’s age, who could play Beethoven already. She was a kind-hearted little woman, and when she heard of my fatherless little nephews and nieces, she begged me to bring them and to let them play with Wilhelmine. I promised to do so some day, but we were too far off to manage it just yet.

I went back, and found Phemie sitting at work. Baby Patience was at her feet on the floor; Effie was employing herself in clearing away the

litter which the other three had been making, and putting the room tidy.

‘How have you been getting on to-day, Phemie?’

‘Pretty well, thank you, dear. I am rather tired, but I am all right as long as I sit still.’

‘Then sit still you shall. I am going to take the bairns for a walk. Who likes to come with me?’

‘Me, me, me,’ sounded from three voices: but little Effie said, ‘I’d rather stay with mother, please, Aunt Cecy.’

‘I think Aunt Cecy ought to stay and rest after her long walk,’ said Phemie. ‘Wait a little while, dear, and don’t trouble yourself with the children.’

‘No, no, Phemie, I am not tired. It will freshen them all up to come out for a little walk.’

‘Mother, I may stay and help you!’ said Effie again.

‘No, dear, run out with the rest, or I shall have you ill, and then that will be more trouble to me.’ And though the child still looked wistful, she obeyed without another word, and we went out into one of

the parks, which was about half a mile off. Here I sat down, and the children played.

‘What are you playing at, children?’ I said, as I saw Georgie and Maggie going round to Sandy and Effie, and telling them a very piteous story.

‘Being poor, aunt Cecy,’ and presently I heard Effie’s voice gravely remonstrating, ‘You mustn’t say you have eaten nothing for a year, Georgie: you would be dead, you know.’

‘I may say it in play.’ So the game went on: and I pondered upon the sad realities of which the children’s game was the burlesque. Presently a little soft hand stole into mine, and I heard, ‘Aunt Cecy!’

‘Well, Effie?’

‘You said we were poor: but we shan’t have to beg, as Georgie was doing in the game, shall we?’

Such a grave, earnest little face looked into mine! ‘No, Effie,’ I said, ‘we are not so poor as that. We have got a little money to live on, but it is not enough to buy us nice things to eat, or pretty things to wear. But even if we had nothing, I hope we should not be obliged to beg, as Georgie was doing: we should try *and work*, and get something that way.’

‘And may I work too?’

‘Yes, when you are old enough.’

‘And so will I,’ said Georgie, who had been listening. ‘And I’ll get a lot of money, and buy mother a scarlet satin gown.’

‘But mother always wears black, you know,’ said Effie gravely.

After some days, I got my long-looked-for letter from Mr Winter. He said that he had recommended me to give lessons in a school at Kensington, and that, if I liked, he could easily get me to sing at private concerts. The remuneration of the school-lessons was, to our ideas, considerable, and Phemie and I almost cried for pleasure.

‘It will just make the difference between riches and poverty,’ I said. What would Augusta have said to the sum which we called riches?

‘We shall be able to get the children good nourishing food, and now and then, perhaps, take them for a day into the country.’

My duties began in a fortnight from that time. They were not slight, certainly, and not remarkably agreeable; but I could earn money by them, and all

minor difficulties I overlooked. For five days in the week I had to attend the school from nine till six, working hard all that time, except the half-hour occupied by the school dinner. The school-girls were not a very pleasant set ; they came from that rank in society which has most pretension and perhaps least real refinement—retired tradesmen who were ashamed of the means by which they had obtained their wealth, and wished to push themselves into what they considered a higher circle. They were either affected or rough, and the average of musical talent was not high among them. Though I did my best, the way they had been grounded in the rudiments of music was so very bad that they made little progress unless I put them back to the very beginning, which some of them thought a great indignity. Mr Winter, who had some pupils in the school, came one day into the room where I was giving my lesson, and sat down to hear me. I felt inclined to be nervous, but I roused all my energies and went through my lesson as usual. It happened to be the last lesson which I had to give, and he offered to walk part of the way home with me, which offer I thankfully accepted ; for it

was a long lonely walk home from Kensington, and I did not always afford myself the luxury of an omnibus.

‘Well, Miss Hope,’ he said as we got out of the house, ‘how do you like teaching music?’

‘It is not a question of liking,’ I answered; ‘but I try to do my best.’

‘I can see that, by the way in which you taught; and I was glad to see it, for it proved to me that my recommendation of you was not a mistake. I could get you another pupil on Saturday mornings, if you liked; but perhaps your one day at home is too precious to spare?’

‘It is precious; but still I should not like to refuse any good offer,’ I answered.

‘Very well: then I will tell Mrs Briscoe of you. I do not like her personally, but at the same time any beginning of private lessons may be useful to you.’ And he went on to give me hints about methods of teaching and little arrangements which his experience had told him were best, and which I carefully stored in my mind. He did not leave me until I was within a few minutes’ walk of our lodgings.

The days and weeks passed on with little change. The children's faces lost their rosiness, and Phemie grew languid and weak in the heat; and I went on working for the bread of the family, and found, in my enforced action, perhaps, the best lot of all. Little Effie was so steady and careful, that she was quite a help to us all; and it was a pretty sight to see the way in which she cared for her mother's wants, and put her shoulder to the wheel to help us. I believe, however, that she was at least as happy under it as most children are who have no care except that of their doll's clothes. Madame Winter was very kind, and now and then had all the children to spend the day with her little girl; and she never failed to send them home laden with nuts, apples, and all sorts of curiosities of German cookery.

'Cecy,' said Phemie one day to me, 'little Patience has outgrown two or three of her frocks, and now that there are no more children to come in to them, I should like to give them away. Whom do you think we had better give them to? There must be plenty of people in London who would be glad of them.'

‘I will tell you,’ I said. ‘You know that church, St Aldhelm’s?’

‘Yes; where they have so much music and curious dresses.’

‘There is a sisterhood there, and I have no doubt they would make use of anything. I will take them next Saturday afternoon, and see.’

This was the beginning of an acquaintance which we both liked, and which brought a little variety into our life. One of the Sisters, whom I always heard called by the name of Sister Eleanor, took rather a fancy to me, and I introduced her to Phemie. Phemie’s Scotch prejudices against anything which savoured of Romanism could not hold its ground when she saw the real work which these sisters were doing, and how, in spite of here and there a little narrowness, and a little tenaciousness to what was not really essential, they were nursing the sick, tending orphans, teaching children, reforming houses, and doing various other things to forward the conquest of Good over Evil. One day Sister Eleanor said to me, ‘Pray are you any relation to one Charles Hope, who went out to America about twelve years ago?’

‘He is my cousin,’ I said; ‘Oh, do you know anything of him?’

‘He is a cousin of mine too. No, I have not heard anything of him for a long time. He was engaged to be married before he left England, I think; but I have never heard anything more of him.’

After this I could not resist telling Sister Eleanor my story, and I felt that we were faster friends than before.

In December, when people were coming back to London, Mr Winter had a concert at which I was to sing: but here we had a difficulty. My mourning was too shabby to wear any longer, and a new silk dress was beyond my means; and yet it was imperative that I should be nicely dressed. One night I took out all my old shabby gowns, and held a consultation over them with Phemie.

‘Mourning or coloured, they are all equally bad,’ I said with a sigh.

Phemie said nothing, but went to one of her own drawers, whence, carefully wrapped in paper, and scented with lavender from Lilac Cottage, she took

out that well-remembered blue silk—her wedding-dress.

‘Not that, Phemie! You can never sacrifice that.’

She smiled a sad smile; more sad than tears would have been. ‘I can never wear it again, you know, dear; and I do not want it to remind me of the day I first wore it. I can never forget that. It will save us the expense of a new one.’ And she sat to work to see how the dress might best be altered to suit me, and the present fashion: and on the concert night I arrayed myself in it, and took my place among the performers, feeling sad enough for a funeral instead of a concert.

How the light dazzled! When my eyes grew accustomed to it, and I could distinguish objects, I looked down on the gay assembly beneath me, variously coloured like a flower-garden: here and there a black-suited gentleman seemed to give more effect to the gorgeous dresses of the mothers and chaperones, and the lighter and more ethereal textures of the robes of the girls who sat there with flowery hair and white opera-cloaks. It was a strange place,

perhaps, to philosophize in ; but I looked at those girls, and wondered whether they would ever come to earn their own living from day to day as I did, and whether they were any happier for being butterflies instead of working bees. Suddenly my glance fell on a face I knew, sitting in the front row of the audience—an oval face, with rich colour, hard dark eyes, black hair, and thin lips, drawn into a set smile. It was my sister-in-law, Augusta Hope, hardly altered since that November day, nine years ago, when we had parted. When people have no one except themselves to think about, the cares of life are wonderfully lightened, and make but little impression. Beside her sat a tall, sallow girl, of fourteen or fifteen—it was her daughter Rosalie. Had she recognized me as I had her? No, she could not have done so ; her eyes were wandering up and down, looking at nothing in particular ; and I remembered that I must be very much changed since she had seen me last in the full bloom of my girlhood. Now, at seven-and-twenty, I was almost a middle-aged woman ; my springtime had long since past by, and the hot dusty summer-time had come, darkening the bright green leaves, and

scorching up the sweet spring flowers. Yet if it were only ripening the harvest for use and store, could I complain if the early beauty of life had passed away ?

Suddenly I saw her look at her programme, and then up at me. On it was written, 'Auld Lang Syne,' Miss C. Hope. She looked fixedly at me for a few moments ; then she seemed as if she were going to speak to Rosalie, but she checked herself. Again she fixed her eyes upon me, and her whole countenance was changed. Before, her expression had been one of curiosity ; now that she had ascertained who I was, she looked at me with a look of concentrated wrath and contempt, as if she would have liked to see me sink through the ground before her eyes. I stood it ; and soon it came to my turn to sing. It was curious that the words of 'Auld Lang Syne' should have been assigned to me ; and it struck me as somewhat ludicrous, when I had to begin—

'Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind ?'

and saw Augusta sitting there before me, evidently not forgetting our old acquaintance. I was inclined to think that, in this case, it would be well that it

should. This woman, who sat here, gaily dressed, had divided me from my lover; had disowned me as her relation; had let my brother, her husband, die alone and neglected in a foreign land. What though she was rich and prosperous, and I poor and working hard for my living? I felt that here, at least, I was her superior; and that it was not, at any rate, incumbent upon me to give any sign of knowing her.

These thoughts passed rapidly through my mind as I stood up to sing, and made me try my very best. I believe that I sang better than I had ever done before:—at least, so Mr Winter told me afterwards. My singing was encored; and after I had sat down again I saw the lady who was sitting next Augusta make some laudatory remark about my singing. Augusta made some short answer, with a sneer upon her face, and though I could not hear what she said, I could hear distinctly the other lady's loud whisper, 'You don't say so!' with a shocked look at me. I should have liked to know what had been said against me, but this, of course was impossible.

Not long after, however, when I went to take

Effie to spend the day with Wilhelmine Winter, Mr Winter said to me, 'I have had a visit from your sister-in-law, Mrs Hope; and she came on your account, as far as I could make out.'

'On my account?'

'Yes; she wished me to use my influence with you about a question which seems to trouble her a good deal. I said I would mention what she said, but I declined using any influence with you one way or the other.'

'What does she want?'

'She wants you to call yourself by some other name. She is afraid that she will be considered of less importance if it is known that any one connected with her works for a livelihood,' was Mr Winter's reply in a tone which was sufficiently expressive of his opinion of Augusta.

Indignation kept me silent.

'I do not wonder that you are angry,' he said. 'But you had better mind what you are about with her. She is a most unscrupulous person, and did her utmost to make me believe falsehoods about you,—which, as I knew the facts, I was able to confute.'

But she said that if you would comply with her wishes in this respect, she would not mind making you a liberal present—fifty pounds or so, I think she said.’

‘Will you tell her, Mr Winter, if you please, that I decline her offer? I value my father’s name a thousand times more than her money, and I have never done—and I hope I never shall do—anything to disgrace it.’

I am afraid that my feelings towards Augusta, as I walked home, were not those of peace or charity. I told Phemie, and had the satisfaction of seeing even her cheek flush as I told her. But when I was going on to express my indignation against Augusta, she stopped me. ‘Don’t go on talking about it, Cecy dear,’ she said, ‘or you will make me as angry as you are, and that will be good for neither of us. I don’t suppose she thought that you would take it in this way—indeed, she could not, or she would not have gone out of her way to offer it to you. Let us try and forget about it. We have plenty of real troubles, without making fresh ones out of such *things* as this.’

It was quite true; and after all, I was too old and too much sobered down to care to keep up anger because of its excitement, even if I had had no higher principle to help me to crush it. So we left off speaking about it, and my work was too hard to allow me leisure to brood over a past insult, had I had the inclination.

The weeks went on, and I heard no more about Augusta. This winter-time was trying, and the need of firing and warm clothes for the children increased our expenses considerably; but still we were paying our way, and I began to look forward to the time when I should be better known, and able to charge more for my lessons, so that we might be able to live in greater comfort, and to lay something by for the children's education.

XX.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

'—Thine, too, the drearier hour,
 When on the horizon's silent line
 Fond hopeless fancies cower,
 And on the traveller's listless way
 Rises and sets the unchanging day,
 No cloud in heaven to slake its ray,
 On earth no sheltering bower.'—KEBLE.

IT was on a Saturday in February—a cold, bitter day, half rain, half sleet, that I sat in Mrs Briscoe's drawing-room waiting for the arrival of my two pupils, Laura and Emmeline. Mrs Briscoe did not habitually use her drawing-room, and as the fire was usually lighted after I came into the house, the atmosphere of the room was neither conducive to comfort for myself, nor to great proficiency from my pupils' red, chilled fingers—for here I taught music as well as singing. I waited some time—so long that the warmth produced by my walk was all gone, and I had full leisure to feel the coldness of the room ;

and at last Mrs Briscoe came in, followed by my youngest pupil, Emmeline, a lank, pale child of fourteen, with stooping shoulders and black circles under her eyes.

‘I must ask you to excuse Laura to-day, Miss Hope,’ said Mrs Briscoe, in that tone of condescension from an unapproachable height which she used to all those whom she considered her inferiors: ‘she is suffering from a feverish attack, and I am afraid is not equal to her music-lesson.’

I proceeded to the piano with Emmeline, who was rather a favourite of mine. She did not seem well, and once she stopped altogether and burst into tears, but her mother scolded her for idleness, and she went on as well as she could. After a time, Mrs Briscoe was called away, and the moment that her mother was out of the room Emmeline put her face down and cried.

‘My dear, what is the matter?’

‘My head aches, and my throat is so sore! I told mamma, and she said it was nonsense; but indeed it isn’t.’

One touch of the child’s burning hand told me

that she was in no fit state for a singing lesson, and we sat down by the fire and talked. In the course of our conversation she told me two facts: one, that Mrs Briscoe had been called away because the doctor was there, and secondly, that he had come because Laura and the youngest boy were both in bed with a sore throat and a rash, which nurse said she thought was scarlet fever.

‘My dear,’ I said, ‘I wish you had let me know, and I would not have come into the house. I have five little nephews and nieces at home, and I am afraid of taking the infection to them.’

‘Papa said at breakfast that we ought to let you know; but mamma said she did not believe it was scarlet fever, and that it did not signify.’

Here entered Mrs Briscoe and the doctor, who came to inspect Emmeline. After a very short examination he pronounced that she too had taken the fever, and was to be put to bed directly. He asked whether I was the governess, and hearing that I only came to give music lessons, he said to me, ‘How came you to come here to a house with a fever?’

‘I did not know they had a fever,’ I replied;

‘I certainly should not have come if I had known it. I hope there is no chance of my conveying infection, for there are children at home.’

‘Oh no, very probably you will not,’ he answered ; ‘it is wisest to run no risks, but it is quite a chance.’

But whatever infection I might have taken, I could not go anywhere else, having nowhere else to go to ; and I went home, hoping that the wind and rain would carry off any that remained in my dress.

But my hopes were in vain. For some days I struggled unsuccessfully against a strange lassitude and weariness which oppressed me : and at last I could hold up no longer, and took to my bed, where I lay half delirious, half stupid, for several days, unheeding of anything which was passing around me. It was happy for us that we had a little money in hand ; for otherwise I do not know how we could have tided over this wave, which proved to be only the first of many.

I do not know that I was ever actually in danger, though I had the fever severely enough, to make Phemie very anxious. I remember that Phemie’s calm face and gentle movements were the only things

that seemed to soothe my delirious fancies, and bring me back to consciousness. When the fever left me, I was very weak, unfit for anything but sleeping and eating. I improved steadily for about a fortnight, and then stood still. It was not for want of tender nursing, for that I had ; nor for want of strengthening food, for Phemie went without, herself, in order that I might have the daily piece of meat which I so much needed. But somehow, when I had just got to the point of getting up after breakfast and sitting in an arm-chair by the fire, I remained at the same point for some time, and could do no more. And just at this time, to crown our misfortunes, Effie and little Patience sickened of the same disease.

Baby Patience had always been a quiet, delicate little thing, silent and gentle ; and she did not belie her name when she was stricken down with the fever. Effie, who was not so ill, was more restless, though, poor child, she tried hard to be patient. She was a great loss to Phemie in the way of minding the children, as during my illness she had been almost like a little mother to them : and now that my weakness prevented my taking any share in the toil,

we were at our wits' end to know what to do. If it had not been for the kindness of Sister Eleanor, who came sometimes to help Phemie in nursing, and sometimes would relieve us of the three healthy children for the whole day, I do not know how we could have managed at all.

One night little Patience had been worse than usual, and I had been up helping Phemie more than my strength would allow. The next day I was fit for nothing but to lie on my bed, where, weak and weary, I let my thoughts wander as they would. They went back to my dear old Highthorpe home : and it came vividly before the eyes of my mind, as if I could see it present before me. My father was there with his dear furrowed face, and wise counsel ; and George, a merry boy with blue eyes and happy voice ; and old Dawson, and Carry King, and all my old friends. And all the little homely nooks came up before me—the mottled patches on the brick wall that surrounded the garden—the corner by the kitchen window where we used to have our bread and milk on fine evenings in summer—even the shimmering light upon the laurel leaves at the front door. I saw

them all, and could have imagined myself a happy little child once more. Then I walked in my thought from the house to the village—past the meadow, the gate, the lane to Eastwood, the turning where the ripest blackberries grew : and in my fancy I saw them all—even the dim light line in the east where the sea was, beyond the marshy plain. Then suddenly the vision faded and the present came over me in all its dreariness : I saw Phemie sitting by my bed with Patience in her arms, and Effie cowering into the fire : and I, the bread-winner of the family, as weak and useless as a child. I turned my face to the wall and sobbed quietly ; so quietly, that Phemie did not perceive it at first. When she did, she laid little Patience, who was asleep, on her bed, and came and leant over me.

‘ Cecy darling, what is the matter ? Do you feel worse ? ’

‘ No, no,’ I said, ‘ it is not that. But life is very hard, Phemie : it is like a great grinding engine, that grinds down and spoils everything that is beautiful and pleasant, and leaves you only what is bare and dreary : and you may cry and pray for it to stop, and

it will not. And everything that is pleasant is gone out of my life, and now I can't even work : and we can't live on what we have of our own, and we must not get into debt, and so I suppose we shall all starve.'

It was only the depression of illness which made me take this view of things : I was generally more hopeful.

'No, no, Cecy,' Phemie answered, soothing me as a child, 'we shall not starve. You will be better soon, and able to go on working. And life is not a great grinding engine, dear—or if it is, it is like the engine of a railway that is taking us home. You know the train goes sometimes through a pretty country, and sometimes through an ugly one ; but we don't complain of the ugliness, because it is the shortest way to our home. And when we are all safe in heaven we shall not care whether it was pleasant or disagreeable here.'

'No, Phemie—but I am not so good as you, and I do mind. I am only half way—perhaps not that—through my life, and if it is all to be like this—Talk to me again.'

She was silent for a moment, and then said, 'I

believe with my whole heart, Cecy, that it all is for the best. If I did not, I could not have borne all—all this. Do you think I could have watched all my hopes die out one by one as they have? I have lost a great deal, I may lose still more; but whatever happens to me, or you, or the children, I know that it is not a cold hard machine that grinds us down, it is God's hand guiding us.'

Phemie spoke calmly and trustfully, with no excitement in face or voice, but a quiet radiant serenity, as one who meant from her inmost heart what she said. While in matters of this world I led her, and she followed me unquestioningly, in all relating to another she was so far before me that she even seemed out of my sight. Her trust was again tried, a day or two after this; for little Patience, our 'rosebud born in snow,' was taken from us. She had been suffering much for some days, and at last she lay on Phemie's lap motionless, only feebly moaning if she were touched or disturbed. So she remained all day: and about sunset the baby-eyes opened, and that strange look of intelligence which comes into the eyes of very young children in suffering lighted

them up for a moment, and then faded. 'The little innocent soul flitted away.'

'How strange it is!' said Phemie softly, as we looked our last at the little waxen face, almost as white as the white violets which the kind Sisters had sent us to lay in her coffin. 'Baby Patience is the first to meet her father, though he never saw her in life. I wonder whether he will know her!'

Gradually my strength returned: but our troubles were not over. The doctor had pronounced me safe from infection before I ventured to the school at Kensington where I taught. But here a disappointment awaited me. The lady who was head of the school received me in a constrained manner, and said that she had been obliged to engage another teacher of singing during my absence, and she found her in some respects to suit her better, so that though she was very sorry—— On my remonstrating on the way in which she had treated me, in filling up my place without giving me notice, she poured forth a volume of words, out of which I could dimly discern the fact that she had heard something to my disadvantage. *If Mr Winter had been at home I could have asked*

him to interfere and find out what the circumstances were; but he had gone, with his wife and his little girl, to spend some months in Germany. I discovered afterwards, however, through another channel, that the reports to my disadvantage were the old stories, disseminated by Augusta, and spread by Mrs Baron, who had some connections in that neighbourhood. The Briscoes had gone to Devonshire for the children's health; and in consequence, all my occupation was gone; and what was worse, all the means which had hitherto kept us afloat.

Our little stock of savings had been entirely dissipated in consequence of the scarlet fever; and Effie remained weak and ailing—she wanted good food, which we could not give her. For now we had nothing but our slender income to support us; and few could guess what a hard fight it was to keep out of debt upon that money. I did my best to get employment. I even went to the expense of having an advertisement printed, on which I announced that music and singing lessons on low terms might be had, and which our landlady volunteered to put in her front parlour window. But I got no pupil in

this way, except the landlady's niece, to whom I gave a weekly lesson at the rate of ten shillings a quarter. Yet I could have borne anything and any amount of stinting for myself, if I had been satisfied about Phemie's health. She had kept up wonderfully through the fever, and the fears that I had once felt about her had been abated ; but now that that trouble was over, they began to rise again. I could not hide from myself that she was thinner than she had been—that she often had a cough and a pain in her side—and that her face was flushed, and her eyes bright. I made her see a doctor, though we could ill spare the money the visit cost us : he said that she must have cod-liver oil, port wine, and nourishing food. We went home to a dinner of bread and butter and tea.

We did not dare to have anything upon credit ; our stock of money was so small that if we once ran into debt, we felt that we could hardly manage to pay. We strove to do as we best could : we left off fires long before the real spring came : we left off eating meat because we could not afford it. At last Phemie had a fainting-fit, so long and so obstinate that I was

quite frightened. We called in one of the Sisters, who told me at once that it was want of proper food, and sent us in a store which lasted for some time : but soon even that was drawing to an end, and I felt that I must do something. I would have worked until I dropped, if I could only have had the work to do : but as I could not get work, I made up my mind to the only other means of procuring subsistence for Phemie and the children ; namely, applying for help to some one.

It was a very bitter pill to swallow ; so bitter, that I would not speak of my intentions, even to Phemie. But we were now utterly friendless ; the Winters were in Germany, my former employers warned against me by false reports, and of course we could not apply to Mr Warren under the circumstances in which we were. I had lost sight of all my former acquaintances since George's marriage ; even of Barbara Talbot I had only heard quite casually that her father was dead, and that she had gone abroad. Augusta was the only person whom I could say that I had a claim upon ; but it was only the direst necessity which could have induced me to

ask her for assistance, after the manner in which she had acted towards me. I would far sooner have worked my fingers to the bone, if I could only have got the work, than have sat down to write as I did to Augusta. I felt, as I did so, that it was the deepest humiliation I had ever known, and only the sight of Phemie's pale face and increasing languor could have nerved me to go through with my task.

In a week's time I had a reply. Augusta did not send me money, she said, because she feared, from what she knew of my character, that I should not make a good use of it. But, on the understanding that we neither of us applied to her again, she sent us a parcel of old clothes, which she hoped, by thrift and carefulness, we should find useful. Any other communication would be returned unopened.

The parcel arrived in time. We were too poor to refuse even this grudging gift, for the children would want new clothes in the winter. I sat down to unpick the skirt of an old brown silk—a dress I well remembered Augusta wearing for the first time at the Beeches, nearly about the time that George proposed to Phemie:—and in doing so I made a strange dis-

covery. Between the dress and the lining, close to the hem, I felt the crackling of paper. 'Ah,' I said to Phemie, 'there has some time or other been a hole in the pocket here, where a letter has dropped through.' We ripped open the lining, and found the letter; it was on foreign paper, directed to George in a hand that I knew well; it was Charley's handwriting, and the postmark was dated August 8th, 185—, the very time when, as we remembered, George was staying with us courting Phemie.

The original direction of the letter was to George's bachelor lodgings in London; but it had been re-directed, and forwarded to the Beeches. The thin paper of the envelope plainly showed through it the strong vigorous strokes of Charley's pen, and I could read my own name easily. The envelope had been opened; we looked, and saw that it contained that missing letter which Charley had written to George, which being unanswered, he had concluded that the report of my engagement to Mr Taylor was true, and so had given up all communication with us. How strange it was to read that letter now! that letter, which if delivered at the proper time, years and years

ago, would have saved both of us so much pain ; but which was now too late to remedy the evil. I have heard of some one, in searching about an old house, lighting upon a secret door, unknown or forgotten till then, and finding everything in the room exactly as the last occupant left it—papers and books on the table, ink dry in the pen, memorandums referring to people and things long since dead and forgotten. I think the finder of that secret room must have felt something like me, as that letter so vividly recalled the time when my heart was young and buoyant, and my hopes fresh and green ; a time divided from the present by a barrier so broad that I had almost forgotten how I used to feel then.

How had Augusta come by that letter ? I suppose that she had seen it brought in with the other letters, and her curiosity being excited by the words which caught her eye through the thin cover, she had salved her conscience by remembering that she had warned me that she would allow of no communication between us ; and that, the letter once in her possession, it had slipped from her pocket into the lining of her dress, and had remained there all these

years. I believed then, and believe now, that she intended to keep it, or burn it : Phemie, more charitable, thought that she must have intended to restore it, but had lost it and been unable to do so.

This is the last time I shall have occasion to mention Augusta. I believe that she is a prosperous woman ; her dinners and dresses are irreproachable, and no one dreams that she has done anything worthy of reprobation. Even her aristocratic cousins have admitted her into their society, so I suppose that the summit of her earthly happiness is now attained. Yet I would rather live all my life in the hand-to-hand struggle with starvation in which Charley's lost letter found us, than in that wilful isolation and loveless self-seeking which is the death of the soul.

The summer passed by, and the dreaded winter returned,—the second that we had passed in London. Mr Winter and his wife were still in Germany, and I had only three or four pupils at very low terms ; so that our difficulties were by no means diminished. We parted with our watches, our book-case, even our piano : we barely managed to live, even with additional money ; and where the next was to come from

we could not imagine. One day, when the afternoons were lengthening—it must have been towards the end of January, Phemie called me to her. The children had gone to bed because it was so cold, and we could not afford to burn any more coals that evening, and Phemie and I were alone.

Cecy,' she said, putting her arm round me, 'I have something I must say to you. I have wanted to say it for a great many days, and now I must.'

And as she paused for a moment, I noticed how flushed her cheek was, and how quick and short her breath came and went.

'What is it, Phemie?'

'Have you noticed how much weaker I have grown in the last few months? I am hardly able to get up the stairs now, when I have been out.'

'You will be better when the warm weather comes,' I answered with a sinking at my heart as I guessed what she was going to say.

'I may be better, but I shall never be well. I went to the doctor this morning, Cecy, when you were out, and I asked him. He told me my lungs were affected—I knew it, I was sure of it before; and that

I must take the greatest care of myself. I made him tell me the truth. He asked if there was consumption in my family; and I told him yes; my father had died of it.'

'But, Phemie, many people live for a long time with their lungs affected.'

'But I do not think I shall, dear. He told me I might last over the summer, when I pressed him to tell me: but I could see that he thought very ill of me. I am sure I shall not live for many months, Cecy; I am so much worse than I was.'

The hollow cough with which she spoke confirmed her words. As for me, I could neither speak nor move; my worst fears were true. Dry-eyed we sat there together, and neither spoke for a while.

'I thought it was best to tell you, so that we might look forward to it together,' she said, still in the same quiet voice. 'I have been a terrible drag upon you lately, I know.'

'Phemie, you have been the stay of us all.'

'When I first knew how it would be,' she went on, 'I was very unhappy. I could not bear to leave you and the little ones. I thought you could not get

on without me. It was very foolish of me; I might have learnt to trust by now, I think: but you see I failed again. Only think, Cecy, what it will be never to do wrong again!’

There was a rapt, far-off look in her face as she spoke. If only no one had more need of forgiveness than Phemie, I thought! She went on, ‘But I am sure now that you will be taken care of, you and the children. Those kind Sisters will help you, I am sure: in fact, I asked Sister Eleanor one day. And now that I don’t feel unhappy about you, Cecy, you can’t think what a relief it is to me to feel that this hard struggle is coming to an end. And there is my dear little Patience waiting for me—she will only be a year or two older than when she left me. I did not think I should see her so soon.’

So Phemie went on talking, calmly and quietly without any excitement. She was not even anxious about us whom she left behind: her trust was so perfect that here, as ever, all would be for the best. And her trust was justified, though, as so often happens, not in the way she expected.

But it took a long time before I could feel recon-

ciled to the prospect of losing her : and as, during the next few weeks, she rallied a little, I began to hope that what she had said might have been caused by the depression of weakness. Yet, all the time I knew in my heart that it was not so.

That was the darkest time of all. 'The worst is not, so long as we can say, this is the worst.' But the night is darkest just before day-break ; and help was coming to us in that quarter from which we could the least have looked for it.

XXI.

COUNTRY FRIENDS.

'I feel the gales that from ye blow
 A momentary bliss bestow,
 As waving fresh their gladsome wing,
 My weary soul they seem to soothe,
 And, redolent of joy and youth,
 To breathe a second spring.'—GRAY.

IT was a soft day in February: the sort of day which encourages the primroses and hepaticas to show their heads, to their great detriment, as the poor things find when the next sleety shower or hard frost comes to wither their beauty. I had taken the children for a walk in the park; and as we were coming back through a crowded street, I saw an unmistakable country-woman gazing with unsophisticated pleasure into a hair-dresser's shop. 'Oh Tom,' I heard her say to a fresh-coloured, stalwart man at her side, 'only look at this lady: ain't she *white?* and how beautiful her hair is done, to be

sure.' And I saw that the object of her admiration was one of those life-size wax images with simpering faces, which hitherto I had never thought could be admired. But when I came in sight of the woman's face, it seemed familiar to me; except that it was plumper, the rosy face, blue eyes, and wide, good-humoured mouth were well known to me of old. It was Carry King, my old playmate of long ago. I sprang forward and seized her hand. 'Carry,' I said, 'don't you recollect me?'

She looked at me for a minute as if not sure of my identity; but gradually recognition dawned in her eyes. 'Why, it's Miss Cecy! Oh, Miss Cecy, I am glad to see you! How do you do, and how is Mr George and all? Ellis, this is Miss Cecy, what I have told you about so often. He is my husband, Miss Cecy. But oh, miss, how you are altered: I never should ha' known you. Why you used to be so rosy, and you've lost all your colour. Oh, I am glad to see you again.'

Carry's eyes were full of tears, and as she was rather too demonstrative for the pavement of a crowded London street, I took her to our lodgings.

Her husband had business to do, and said that he would call for her in a couple of hours. There was much to tell and much to hear. Carry was as prosperous in life as we were the reverse. She had married a small farmer at Corfleet, about ten miles from Highbrope; they had three children, and she evidently thought 'Ellis' the first, best, and cleverest man on earth, and her children the fattest, prettiest, and forwardest. She was very much distressed by the state in which she found us; for our poverty was plain to any eye, and when our dinner appeared—a rice pudding and some cold water—I saw the tears in her eyes again. She looked compassionately on the pale faces and thin cheeks of our London-bred children, especially Effie, who was shooting up tall and thin, and wanted change of air and diet; and though she did not say much, I thought that some great idea was working in her mind. It came out at last. When her husband called for her, she bid us good-bye; but in about three minutes made her re-appearance, looking red and confused.

'If you please, ma'am—and please, Miss Cecy, if you won't think it a liberty—but if you would let us

have Miss Effie at the farm for a fortnight. Ellis and me would be so very glad if you would let her come back with us ; and I'm sure, Miss Cecy I'd take the same care of her as if she was my own, and—and—'

Kind-hearted Carry ! how thankfully we accepted her offer. They were going back by the evening train, and Effie's small wardrobe—poor child, how very small it was !—was packed, and I went with her to the station. Effie herself, a shy, retiring child, was the one of the party who was least pleased with the arrangement ; but she was too gentle and obedient not to do what she was told without a murmur, and only a suppressed sob when she parted with her mother told what her feelings were. I made acquaintance enough with Mr Ellis to find that he was a simple unpretending sort of man, who gave me the impression of possessing excellent sense, and equal good-humour to his wife's ; and Carry was too little unchanged from her old self for me to doubt about trusting Effie with her. At last I returned to Phemie, who had put the children to bed, and was sitting by the window, deep in thought. Her slight

figure showed dark against the western evening sky, and the light of the sunset gleamed upon her hair. I entered the room, well pleased with the afternoon's adventure; I went up to her and took her cold little hand in mine.

‘Phemie, are you not glad about Effie?’

‘Very glad, and very thankful. But, Cecy, do you know, I have been thinking of a plan which might perhaps do when I am taken from you:’ and she spoke as quietly as if she were not alluding to herself.

‘What is it?’

‘I thought that you should go down into the country, and take a cottage, and there set up a day-school for little children, whom you could teach with our own. I dare say you might get a recommendation from one of the Sisters. I should like the children to be brought up in the country; it would be so much better for them; and I can never forget how happy Maggie and I were at Invermorán when we were children. And perhaps you might get a few pupils for singing as well.’

‘Ah, if Mr Winter had not gone to Germany!’

And if Aunt Smith were alive ! we should have got on better then. But oh, this weary London !'

A sudden thought struck me. 'Phemie, why should we not leave London ? I have so few pupils that what they bring us in is quite swallowed up in the sum we have to pay for rent. I am to go down to Corfleet in a fortnight to fetch Effie home ; perhaps Corfleet might suit 'us. Any how, I will make inquiries. And think, to be in the country again !'

No one who had spent two years in London, without a sight of open country, or anything greener than the Parks, can fancy how I looked forward to the day on which I was to go to Corfleet to fetch Effie home. I wished Phemie could have gone instead of me, but I knew that the fatigue would be more than she could bear. I started in the third class of a parliamentary train ; the weather was propitious, being warm and spring-like, with a soft west wind. Estford was the station for Corfleet, and when I came in sight of the well-known platform, where I used to see George off when he went to school, I nearly cried. Mr Ellis's light cart was waiting to convey me to Corfleet, and soon I had

mounted its height, and was driving along the well-known street. There were many new houses built since I had seen it ; we passed close by the Vicarage, where the Barons lived, and I saw Edith Baron playing at croquet on the lawn. Yet Edith was a year older than I was, and I pondered, as on a curious problem, how I should feel now if I had no other object or care in life except to amuse myself—in the morning with work or light reading, in the afternoon with walks or croquet.

We passed the Barons', and through deep muddy lanes, sheltered enough to display tufts of opening primroses, notwithstanding the early season of the year. Then we came in sight of Highbury church,—at which I must have given way to my feelings if I had been alone. Then we left it upon our right, and drove on ; and after a seven miles drive, we arrived at the village, and finally at our destination—a pretty white farmhouse, with rich red mossy tiles, and casement windows, thrown open to admit the sweet spring air, which fluttered the snowy white window-curtains—so very white to my eyes, accustomed to *London smoke*. There was a square grass

plat in front, and an orchard garden behind; at one side of the house was a large pond, where ducks and geese dived and gabbled, and on the opposite side of the road was a hedge with tall elm trees (in which the rooks were building), the boundary of a wheat-field, where the blades were just beginning to appear—so young and thin that the brown earth showed between them. At the gate stood Effie, looking out for our approach; her fortnight of country air and new milk had brought a colour to her cheek and light to her eye, and she looked quite a different child to what she had been when she left us. She rushed to my arms as I got down from the tax-cart, and Carry came behind her to welcome me, hearty and ungrammatical as ever. But who was that behind her, with a withered smiling face, black silk gown, and white kerchief?

Who but old Dawson?

I will not attempt to describe the kisses, and tears, and smiles which showered upon me. How Dawson bemoaned my lost rosiness, and when I said that I was nearly nine-and-twenty, tried to persuade me that I did not look my age, even with my old,

faded, careworn face. How we cried together when we talked about George ; and how pleasant it was to see the old lady's face, hardly altered at all from old times, though she was now past seventy ! This was a pleasant little surprise planned for me by Carry ; and I am sure I enjoyed it as much as she could possibly have wished.

The dinner was spread in true farmhouse style ; a big meat pie, a Christmas-like plum-pudding, and nuts and apples enough for all the children in the parish. It was such fare as I had not tasted for many a long day ; and I did not wonder at the round rosy faces and fat arms and legs of Carry's children, fed on such food, and playing in such sweet fresh air. After dinner Effie and the little Ellises went to play in the garden, and I proceeded to tell Carry about Phemie's illness, and our scheme of setting up a little school somewhere. I asked whether she thought there would be any opening at Corfleet.

'Miss Cecy,' answered Carry, 'I don't know one way or the other, and that's the truth ; but I wanted to tell you what I was a-saying to Ellis last night. I says to him, says I, "Ellis, do you mean to take a

lodger again this year if we can find one ? ” For you see, this house is bigger nor what we want, and most every year we let three rooms for the summer months. “ Well,” says he, “ I don’t know ; I didn’t fancy the people we had last, and I’d sooner take somebody that didn’t pay so well, if so be I knew them.” Then I says, “ I wish we could get poor Mrs George, and Miss Cecy, and the children, down here for the summer ; the air’s done that poor little pale thing all the good in the world, and I should like to see them all out of that there nasty smoky London, which if ever I go there again, you may call me a fool and welcome.” So what I say is this : if you’d like to lodge here, Miss Cecy, you’re welcome to the rooms for as long as you like, and you needn’t pay me till it’s convenient ; and you could look out for something to suit you. And I’m sure, Miss Cecy, I’d do all that in me lay to make you comfortable.’ Carry was so eager about her generous plan that her apron went up to her eyes, though it was not a cotton one, but a black silk, put on on purpose to do me honour.

‘ And now,’ said Dawson, before I could speak,

‘you’ve had your say, Carry Ellis, and I’ll have mine. Miss Cecy, I’ve got a matter of eighty pounds in the savings bank, part of what I’ve saved, and part what I’ve had left me : and I’ve made my will and left it all to you and poor Master George that’s gone ; and as you are all that’s left, it is all yours. And if so be you’re in want of a few pounds just now, why you might as well take it as when I’m dead, and can’t see you enjoy it.’

I hardly knew what to say : the relief was so great and so unexpected. ‘ But, dear Dawson,’ I said, kissing the kind old face, ‘ I don’t like to rob you of your savings.’

‘ Nonsense about robbing, my dear. I’ve got enough to live on, and ain’t it as good as your own? ’

‘ But lend it me, and let me pay you back when I can. You may want it for some other purpose—’

‘ Miss Cecy, do you suppose it’s likely that I shall ever want it for anything more than to help your father’s child—you, and poor Master George’s wife? You may call it lending if you like, but it’s all your own look-out whether you ever pay me or not.’

you're a borrowing of it from your own self, that's all.'

How thankful I felt! The daily pressure of anxiety might be put aside for a time: I should be able to provide Phemie with the little comforts that her state required: and who knew whether country air and freedom from anxiety might not prolong her life? I leant back in my corner when I got back into the train, and positively cried for joy, so much so that Effie observed it, and wondered why. Phemie seemed almost as happy, and the children were enchanted: the only person who lamented our going was our landlady, who had looked upon us as permanent fixtures, and whom we had never kept waiting a day for her rent. Poor woman, I believe she had had hard struggles as well as we, and knowing our poverty, was proportionally grateful: and when we took leave of her she gave us all presents: to the children china ornaments, such as one sees upon cottage mantelpieces, to me a pair of bead mats, and to Phemie a pair of muffatees. They were all more valuable as an expression of goodwill than intrinsically, but we were grateful for the kindness which they betokened. The pair of bead mats forms one of the

few ornaments of my present sitting-room, far enough away from those London lodgings.

The moving of our furniture cost us but little, for we had so little left that we might have carried them upon our backs, like snails. We arrived in the evening, and I shall not soon forget the children's ecstasy : the fire was so bright, the cloth was so white, the little beds in which they were to sleep were so delightful. In fact, notwithstanding the frightful carpet with which the floor was covered, the whitewashed walls, low ceiling, and bright furniture made it look pleasant and home-like : and Carry thoroughly fulfilled her promise of making us comfortable.

The first effect of the change of air was to make Phemie better than she had been for a long time. Cod-liver oil was not now an unattainable luxury : and she was able to get up to breakfast, to walk some little distance, and to sit upon the sofa working by the window, watching the children at their play, and taking as much interest in the pleasant sights and sounds of country-life as they did. It was a positive amusement to her to watch the rooks building in the elms opposite the window—labouring

to detach a twig from the bough with their beaks; sometimes finding it too hard, and deserting it; sometimes being robbed of their prize by some stronger bird. But the nests did get on, and the buds on the trees reddened and swelled preparatory to bursting out into leaf. Then the blossoms came, clothing the trees in pale green, which the children thought were the young leaves, and were proportionally disappointed when they dropped in heaps off the trees, and left the boughs bare once more—like hopes deferred.

The farm was too far off from the school and church for Phemie to be able to walk to church, or for Carry's children to go to school. I volunteered to teach them with our own, and had quite a little class in the morning. Both Carry and her husband thought this a most unexampled piece of condescension on my part: with them, as with many others, the fact of our not setting ourselves up as superior to them made them far more careful than they would have otherwise been to give us the amount of respect which they thought due to our higher rank. There was another outlying farm not far off, and presently the children who lived there came and joined my class, paying me

a trifle every week, which, however, was not a trifle to me; and soon I had as many as sixteen children, into whom I instilled the elements of reading, writing, summing, and singing.

It was not Mr Ellis' habit to use his horse on a Sunday: those who could not walk as far as the church, generally stayed at home. But one day, when Phemie was trying to persuade me that by starting very early, and resting several times on the way, she might manage it—for she had the unconsciousness of her own weakness which always accompanies her complaint—Mr Ellis seemed to receive a new idea. "I say, wife," he said, "why shouldn't I drive Mrs George in my cart, if she can't get to church no other way?"

"I don't know why you shouldn't," she said.

"Then so I will; and put him up at the Waggon and Horses. Then we'll start betimes to-morrow, if you please, ma'am: and I hope you won't find it too much for you."

It was the first time for many months that Phemie had been able to go to church; for, during the last winter in London, she had been too poorly even

to go to St Aldhelms. I had never, in her brightest youth, seen a happier, sweeter expression upon her face than she wore now. The golden hair was thin and had silver streaks here and there, and did not ripple in a rich mass behind her ears ; and the colour upon her cheek was not now the rosy bloom of health, but the hectic flush of disease. But the true peace of mind which comes after the battle is over is far deeper and more lasting than the happy youthful confidence which precedes it. Phemie had ‘undergone, and overcome.’

‘Cecy,’ she said as we came out of church, and sat on the wooden seat in the porch, while Mr Ellis went to fetch his horse, ‘do you remember my telling you that things would somehow come right for us? I thought to-day in church that my words were coming true: we are now able to live comfortably and at very little expense here, and you are able to earn a little to help us on. I am so thankful ; I don’t think I have ever been so happy since you had the fever and lost all your employment. I am sure it is a lesson to us never to give up trusting ; for God knows better than we do.’

It was a day or two later that a lady walked up to the farmhouse door. Carry opened it: I saw that the visitor was a tall person, but her shady hat prevented me from seeing her face, as I sat at the upper window. I heard Carry say, 'Oh, you're come back, Miss: how kind of you to come all this way!' and the answer, in a voice which I thought I had heard before: 'Yes, I am only just come back; but I did not come only to see you this time, Mrs Ellis—' and then the door was closed. By-and-by, however, Carry put her head in at the door.

'It's Miss Talbot, Miss Cecy, the Reverend Brand's niece, as lives with him. She has been out for several months; but she is come back now, and she says she thinks she knows you. Will you come down and see her?'

Barbara Talbot! Wonders would never cease. I hastily followed Carry down-stairs: and there, sure enough, sat Barbara Talbot; but how changed from the brilliant, outspoken, self-willed girl whom I had known ten years ago! Her great black eyes were as deep and expressive as ever, but they were softer and quieter: the rich flush on her brown complexion

had toned down : the features, without losing their strength, had lost their look of pride and self-consciousness. It was easy to read in her face that she had suffered, and that that suffering had subdued and softened her character.

I went up to her immediately. 'Barbara !' I said, 'is it really you?'

'Little Cecy Hope !' she said ; and bending down, she kissed me, and I saw her throat swell and her eyes grow dim, as if she were choking down some too strong emotion. After that we neither of us spoke for some seconds ; Carry had left us to ourselves : and I think we both of us feared to trust our voices. Presently she broke the silence. 'How have you been getting on all this time, Cecy ? Where have you been, and what have you been doing ?'

'I have been struggling to live, and that not very successfully,' I answered : 'the last year has been terrible work.'

'I see in your face that you have gone through a great deal,' she said ; 'but in what way?'

Then I told her of our fight for existence from day to day in London ; and she said, 'If you had

only let me know! Did Mrs Hope of the Beeches know of this?’

‘Yes, she knew of it. But she refused to hold any more communication with me when George married, because she did not like him to do what she called disgracing the family, and I had known of it—’

‘Ah! he married the little governess, did he not?’

She tried to speak in an indifferent way, but failed. I answered without looking at her. ‘Yes. Her name was Phemie Campbell. She is—has been all this time—more than I can express. She is here now, with me; but she is ill.’

‘What is the matter with her?’

‘Consumption, brought on by trouble and want.’

I suppose my voice quivered as I spoke, though I tried to control it. But Barbara astonished me; she put her arm round me and kissed me.

‘Oh, Cecy, Cecy, how much you have had to go through! I thought I had suffered as much as most people, but you have had far more to bear than I have. If I had known—Where is she? You will

let me see her some time—and the children?’ I was getting up to call the children, but she interposed with one of her old imperious movements. ‘No, not now. I want to hear more about you—and first of all, Cecy—’ her voice dropped and her eyes were averted—‘tell me about your brother. I only know what I saw in the papers.’

‘We know very little more than you do. His pocket-book was forwarded to us: and Captain Arbuthnot’s death was proved. They showed the place where they said he—they were both buried.’

‘And you have given up all hope?’

‘Yes, all, it is so long ago.’

‘And yet this did not soften Mrs Hope?’

‘No, not at all. She spread reports about me which were utterly untrue, and which caused me to lose the employment by which I hoped to support us all.’ Here I stopped, and saw that Barbara’s face wore a look of suppressed indignation, though she said nothing. I did not think it necessary to spread the story of the detained letter, so I said no more.

‘And your sister’s health failed in consequence?’

‘In consequence of our pinching and struggle to

live—at least, that is what I believe to have been the case. She might have been ill, in just the same way, if we had been more comfortably off; so that I cannot say for certain.’

‘If you could, it would be the same as saying that Mrs Hope killed her,’ said Barbara.

‘She has enough to answer for without my saying that,’ I said; ‘I cannot think that even Augusta would have been so hardhearted, if she had seen the way in which we had to live. However, I would rather not talk nor think about her. It is for Phemie’s sake that I feel it, and I know that Phemie dislikes dwelling on past injuries more than anything.’

‘You will let me see her?’ said Barbara: and I conducted her upstairs to the little sitting-room, where Phemie was sitting by the open window, and the caw of the rooks, and the smell of the daisied grass-plot, came pleasantly through it.

‘I used to know you long ago, Mrs Hope,’ she said; and Phemie took her outstretched hand in both of hers, and looked up at her face. How changed they both were since those days of croquet at the

Beeches, when George had irretrievably estranged himself from Barbara by paying attention to Phemie.

‘I am very glad to see you,’ said Phemie, simply, ‘because I know you and Cecy used to like one another, and I hope she will have a friend now. She gave up all her friends because of me, and now perhaps—’

She did not conclude her sentence, but I knew what she meant.

XXII.

TIDINGS OF JOY.

'Ten years ago, five years ago,
 One year ago,
 Even then you had arrived in time,
 Though somewhat slow :
 The frozen fountain would have leaped,
 The buds gone on to blow,
 The warm south wind would have awaked
 To melt the snow.'—C. ROSSETTI.

BARBARA soon became a constant visitor at the farm. She did not often speak of her deeper feelings, but once she revealed to me, almost involuntarily, what they were, and what the story of her life had been.

Phemie had a longing for apples—one of those irrational longings or, as Carry called it, 'lingerings,' which sick people have. It was not time for the apples of this year to have ripened, and they had none of last year's at the farm. I went to a little shop in the village, where I had sometimes seen apples

in the window ; and while I 'was asking for them I met Barbara.

‘ Why did you not ask me ? ’ she said : ‘ we have beauties at the Rectory.’

‘ I never thought of asking you,’ I said, ‘ it is such a little thing.’

‘ Promise me, Cecy,’ she said, taking my hand, ‘ that you will ask me whenever you want anything.’

‘ That is such an extensive promise to make,’ I said, half-laughing.

‘ Never mind : make it now.’ The imperiousness of her tone was half in play, half in earnest.

‘ I can’t,’ I said, intending to speak playfully too : but perhaps my tone was more earnest than I intended it to be, as I thought of our painfully preserved independence. Her brown cheek flushed, and she withdrew her hand. ‘ I did not think you would have borne malice,’ she said.

‘ Borne malice, Barbara ? What should I bear you malice for ? ’

“ She gave one keen eager scrutiny to my face, as if she could have liked to read my thoughts. I

bore her gaze without flinching. 'I believe you don't,' she said, with a half-sigh.

'But what did you think I meant?'

'It is so long ago, that perhaps bygones had better be bygones. Yet I don't know—perhaps I owe it to you to explain. I meant that affair at the Beeches, when I—when I treated your brother George so badly.' Her face was averted, but I could hear the tremulousness of her voice, and I could see how her neck and cheek glowed.

'I never thought of remembering that against you, Barbara. We have both—I mean, circumstances have changed so much since then with both of us. I dare say there was some fault on both sides.'

'No,' said Barbara, 'it was my fault, and mine only. The only excuse I had was, that I was a spoilt child, and very young—only eighteen; and I had no mother nor sister to warn me what I was doing. But if it is any expiation to feel that one has marred all the beauty and use of one's life by one's own fault, you may be assured of that, Cecy.' She stopped for a little, and then went on. 'You told me home truths once which I would not hear. I

have long since found how true they were. No one could have put up with my pride and absurdity—I have long since learnt to acknowledge that. I have no doubt that he was much happier with the little fair girl whom I despised than he could ever have been with me—as I was then.’

‘Dear Barbara,’ I said, ‘don’t go over all those old things now. We have each of us suffered too much to bear any rancour against the other : and for him, it matters little now.’

‘Then—to show me that you have forgiven me—will you make the promise you refused just now?’

‘What promise?’

‘That you would always appeal to me whenever you wanted anything. For, Cecy, here I am—not young now—past thirty, and getting on to middle age ; and I have more money than I know what to do with. I have no near relations to depend upon me ; and if you would look to me to defray the expense of the children’s education—and—and—anything else you want, I should be more glad than I can say.’ I was silent for a moment in astonish-

ment : and then she added in a low voice which faltered and trembled :

‘It is the only thing I care to do—to help *his* children.’

What could I do but make the promise which she desired ?

When I told Phemie, on the evening of the same day, a happy smile shone in her eyes. ‘I always said it would come right in the end, Cecy,’ she said ; ‘and now, you see, it does. I don’t think that any one ever had so much to be thankful for as I have. Every wish I have seems to be granted in turn.’

And this was the young widow, who sat at her window day after day, watching the sights and sounds of this spring, but knowing perfectly well that she would never look upon another.

If it had not been for the words which she constantly let fall, when we were alone together, I should have hoped that the London doctor might have been mistaken, and that our Phemie might even yet have been spared to us. For she did not get visibly worse, though we could not call her essentially better ; yet she certainly was able to do much

more than she had done before we left London. One week in June, she had seemed so bright and like herself that we even proposed an expedition, which had long been thought of—namely, that we should go, with all the children, to Highthorpe—picnic in the wood, and visit our old haunts. The original idea had been that Carry should drive me over in the cart when she went to see her father ; then I said I should like to show the children all the old places which they had heard of so often ; and then I saw Phemie looking wistfully, as if she would like to go, and found that it had long been a favourite though unexpressed wish, that she should go and see George's early home. So Barbara agreed to lend us her pony carriage, and one glorious day in June—' a perfect day, wherein should no man work, but play '—we started on our ten-mile drive. The children were in high delight. Good living and country air had made their cheeks rosy and their limbs plump ; and with the feeling of health had come back the happy tempers and the uproarious spirits of old days. Their mirth was contagious : I found myself laughing, as I went along, as I had not laughed for years : and perhaps it was well for me

that I did so, since if I had not laughed the sight of the old familiar things I saw must have made me cry.

At last we arrived at our destination. The pony and carriage were put up: we went to the wood, where we enthroned Phemie upon a seat of soft green moss; and then, having eaten our meal, the younger children began to play and I went off with Effie to visit some of my old friends in the village.

Ah, what a difference twelve years make! Few of the village folks inhabited the same cottages as when I left them. Those whom I had known as children were married; those who had been elderly persons in my time were now dead. The very church and vicarage were altered, as I have before said: only one thing they could not alter—the view from the churchyard was the same as when, more than twelve years before, I had stood there at my father's funeral. Still the woods to the west slept in golden haze—still the slow broad river ever widening more and more crept through bare flat marshes to the dim sea-line in the east.

'O end to which our currents tend,
Inevitable sea,

To which we flow, what can we know
What can we ask of thee ?

A roar we hear upon the shore
As we our course fulfil :
Scarce we divine a sun will shine
And be above us still.'

Ay—but to such as Phemie, the sea-roar changes into the voice of multitudes which no man can number chanting a song of praise; and the sunlight is faint in comparison to that light which shines there.

We returned to the wood. Phemie declared that she had enjoyed her quiet afternoon very much, and was not at all tired: and behold! here were the children, weary with their play, coaxing her to tell a story.

'No, no, children, you must not tease mother now, she is tired. Shall I tell you one instead?'

'No, Aunt Cecy, your stories are not half as pretty as hers.'

'I am not at all tired, Cecy,' said Phemie: 'I should like to tell them one. What shall it be about, children?'

'About you when you were a little girl, mother.'
She sat there, leaning against a tree with a soft

mossy trunk. Maggie's brown head was pressed closely against her, Sandy was sitting coiled up at her feet, Georgy lay at full length on the grass looking up through the golden sunlit leaves into the sky, and Effie sat soberly by my side, with her eyes fixed upon her mother's face. There was nothing to be seen except trees and woodland; nothing to be heard but the song of birds and the fall of running water. That sight often comes back to me now; and the mother's sweet tender face, with its transparent colouring and fragile beauty, which was the fairest of all. Her story was simple enough: yet perhaps worth repeating.

‘Once, children, when I was quite a little girl, about nine years old, I went for a long walk with my sister Maggie. We were to take a piece of meat to a poor woman who lived on the other side of the mountain: we set off merrily, for we knew the way well. We took our basket with us: we did our errand, and then we turned back to come home. There was a wide burn to cross, and it was in the spring, when the snow had melted on the mountains, so that the burn was quite full—the water had

covered the stepping-stones, and some one had laid a couple of fir-trunks across instead. I should not like to cross on them now, but then I did not care. Maggie and I took off our shoes and stockings, that we might cross the better ; and when we were on our way to the cottage we crossed over safely. But when we were on our way back, we sat down again to take off our shoes and stockings : and Maggie had hers off first, and over she ran like a little mountain goat. When she came to the end of the fir-trunks, she sprang down : and I suppose the trunks were not very securely laid, for she pushed them aside by the force of her spring and they swung round into the water. There I saw them waver and spin round for a moment—and then—down they swept out of sight in the rushing burn, leaving me all alone on one side and Maggie on the other.

“ O Maggie, Maggie ! ” I said, and I began to cry.

“ Don’t cry, Phemie ! ” she shouted loud, so that I could hear her across the noise of the water. “ Stop there, and I will go and tell father.” And she turned round to go ; but I was so frightened, that I ran up to my ankles in the burn. “ Maggie, Maggie,” I said,

“don’t go ! Stay with me ! Don’t leave me here all alone ; the night will come soon. Don’t go !”

‘ When she heard me crying and sobbing so, she stopped.

“ Phemie,” she said kindly, “ don’t cry. I must go ; father will wonder why we don’t come home, and may be he will walk all round by Janet Campbell’s to look for us. You would not like him to do that, when he comes home so tired. So you see I must go. But don’t be frightened, and don’t stir from where you are till he comes for you. Promise ?”

‘ I promised, and Maggie ran off, looking behind often and waving her hand. The wide burn ran between me and her and between me and my home ; and I sat down and cried ; and then I cheered up and wondered whether the river that Christian had to cross in the Pilgrim’s Progress was as deep and as quick as that. I was not frightened ; I was used to the mountains, and knew that nothing would come to hurt me ; but when the night began to fall I began to feel very lonely and sad. And soon it clouded over, and began to rain ; and I put my plaid all over me like a little tent, and still I waited beside

the burn. And when it got quite dark, as I was sitting there, I heard my father's voice, calling me in Gaelic—not from the other side of the river, as I expected, but from this. So I answered him “Here, father!” and I sprang upon his neck and began to cry. But he said, “Did my bairn think her father was going to leave her, and not come for her at all? Silly little Phemie! But now we must make haste, for it is very late; and since Maggie has spoilt the crossing of the burn for us, we must walk all round by Kinloch-moran bridge.” So we set off; it was many miles round, and often my father had to carry me, and often to drag me on with his walking-stick; but at last we reached home, children, and found mother and Maggie looking out for us.’

The children made a few childish remarks on the story, and the three younger ones ran off again to play. But Effie remained sitting beside me. Phemie seemed lost in her own thoughts.

‘It seems almost like the story of my life, Cecy,’ she said. ‘Maggie went over the stream first, and left me on the other side—she went to her home long ago. And then I waited, and I have been led by

long and dreary paths, through rain and wind; and if I had not been helped and carried, I could not have got on at all; I must have dropped by the way. And now, I think, I can just see the light gleam in the window, and soon the door will open, and Maggie will be standing there; I think she will have Baby Patience in her arms.'

I directed Phemie's glance to Effie, who had been sitting very quiet, listening, with a look of bewilderment and distress upon her wide-open eyes and parted lips. I fancy that she had understood what Phemie had said, more than we thought, and her mother called her.

'Come to me, Effie, my darling.'

And mother and child were clasped in a close, clinging embrace.

'Mother, you are better now. You can do much more than you used to be able to do.'

It was easy to see the current of thoughts in the child's mind.

'My darling, I am better just now—but—' and here followed a long low whisper, at the conclusion of which I saw the child's whole frame shaking with

irrepressible, quiet sobs. She knew now what was the shadow which lowered over us all.

We returned home soon after this. Phemie did not seem worse that night; but the next day I did not think her so well, and by-and-by it was plain that she was gradually losing ground. We said it was the heat, or thunder in the air, or the sudden lowering of temperature after a summer storm, which made her seem less well: but this was to try to deceive ourselves. Soon she no longer came down to breakfast, nor walked out in the evening: all that she could now do was to sit on the orchard seat with her work; but even that tired her. I thought I saw how it would all go on now, and looked on to the coming months with a dread of what the future might bring. I never hoped that Phemie would recover, now; it had so long been the impression upon her own mind that she would die, that I had come to believe it too. But suddenly—quite suddenly—an event came upon us which changed the current of our minds.

We were all sitting at breakfast one morning, when Carry's eldest little daughter came up—'If you

please, Miss Hope, Miss Talbot want you downstairs.'

I went down, and there stood Barbara trembling with eagerness—her cheeks crimson, and her eyes full of tears. In her hand she held the morning's *Times*. She tried to speak, but her voice would not come. She caught hold of my hand, and pointed to the following paragraph, dated from Calcutta.

'Great excitement has been caused by the reappearance of a gentleman who has been long believed to be dead—Mr George Hope—'

I read this sentence over and over again, without in the least bringing my senses to understand it. My eyes grew dim, my head swam, and I was obliged to sit down on the nearest chair. Then suddenly Barbara found her voice.

'He is alive, Cecy!' She came near and took both my hands in hers. 'He is alive, and coming back to you and to her. He has been in all sorts of wonderful adventures—but he is alive.' And at last, by dint of reiterating these words about twenty times, she made me understand them, and I burst into tears, which only her wise management prevented from

becoming hysterical. At last I was quiet enough to take the paper in my own hand and read what was said.

It was not much after all; but what it said was evidently true. George had escaped from prison : Captain Arbuthnot was dead. George had sailed by the earliest mail from Calcutta—the same, apparently, which had brought the news. The intelligence was dated June, and this was July. I kissed Barbara again and again, and then she said, ‘ I will leave you the precious piece of paper : I must go now. O Cecy dear, I am so glad ! ’

And I am sure that none of us rejoiced with a deeper and more unselfish joy than Barbara Talbot.

I had to pass through the kitchen, where Carry was at work. But I could not stop to tell her : the first news must be for George’s wife. And leaving the clamorous party at the breakfast-table, I passed into the inner room, where Phemie was lying on the bed ; her eyes closed. Full as my mind was with other matters, I could not help noticing, with a sharp pang, how sunken the pretty cheeks were now, and how quick and short the breath came ; and how thin

and straight the golden hair was, without any wave or ripple. If this news had come a year ago! then, perhaps, it might have saved Phemie's life; but now it came too late.

She opened her eyes. 'Cecy,' she said, when she saw my face, 'what has happened to you? You look so strange. Has anything happened to the children?' and she sat up in bed, and the sharp, hacking cough came on, which was so frequent now. I soothed her anxiety.

'Nothing has happened to the children, Phemie dear. They are all very happy at breakfast:' and a shout from the next room proved the truth of what I said.

'But your voice shakes, Cecy. Something has happened. Tell me what it is.'

Then I sat down by her on the bed, and putting my arm round her, said, 'Phemie, you have borne a great deal of trouble: do you think you can bear joy?'

She looked inquiringly at me; the colour rushed into her face, but she did not speak. Her lips opened, but she uttered no word: she sat looking at my face.

‘George is not dead, Phemie. He is alive, and coming home to you.’

‘Ah!’ she said, with a quick catching of her breath. The exclamation was a strange, long, soft cry of joy—and then she turned round and buried her face in the pillow. She said nothing, but her whole frame shook and quivered. I gave her time to realize the idea—I would not disturb her in the first moment of her joy.

For a few minutes she remained thus—then she said, ‘Did I dream it? say it again.’

I repeated what I had said before.

‘But is it true? Am I asleep or awake?’ I showed her the precious paper. ‘I can’t see it,’ she said, ‘read it, Cecy.’ And when I read it she burst into tears, which shook her whole frame, and were so violent that I feared their effect upon her. But they were a natural relief to the over-charged brain: and by-and-by they cleared away, and left her exhausted indeed, but with the happiest smile that I had ever seen her wear—happier even than in the old time when George had told her of his love.

Only one painful thought crossed her mind: ‘Oh,’

she said, 'I shall have such a little while to be with him! He will be so sorry when he comes back and finds me like this.'

'Phemie dear, perhaps this great joy may do you good, and keep you with us after all,' I said with a faltering voice.

'No,' she said, 'I am past that. Don't hope for that, Cecy, it is quite impossible:' and she laid her thin hand on mine. Ah, how transparent it was, and how plainly the bones showed beneath the skin!

'Oh, Phemie, to think what this would have been if you were what you used to be!'

'Don't cry, Cecy,' she said. 'This is more than I could have ever hoped for. You know I hoped to meet him, before long—but not here: and I have often been sorely troubled, of late, to think that the boys would have no one with a father's authority over them. I was troubled without reason you see—I have not even yet learnt the lesson of trust.'

'You never said anything about it to me.'

'No, you had so many other things to trouble you, that I would not put that into your head: but it has

often haunted me at night when I could not sleep. But everything I want always comes to me, sooner or later. It is very wonderful!’

She spoke in a low, awestruck voice, and soon after her eyes closed, and she slept, wearied out with joy, like a little child. Her joy was perfect, because it was so utterly unselfish: the idea of her children not being left fatherless, but being cared for and protected by the best of all earthly protectors, made her so happy that it swallowed up all longing to live on her own part, and the only regret she felt was for the ‘disappointment’ which George would feel.

Great was the rejoicing when I made the news known at the farm. Carry laughed and cried at once, in the fulness of her delight: and all the children, except Effie, were in a state of uproarious glee. But Effie, silent and quiet always, was more so now than ever: she crept close to her mother’s side, and would hardly leave her all day.

‘Effie,’ said Sandy and Maggie that afternoon, both setting upon her at once, ‘why do you look so grave? Are you not glad that papa is coming home?’

‘Yes,’ said Effie, ‘very glad :’ but the tears rushed into her eyes as she spoke.

‘It’s the very nicest thing that could have happened,’ said Maggie : ‘just like a story-book :’ and the young lady tossed her straw hat into the air to testify her joy. ‘Don’t you think it is, Effie?’

‘Is what?’ Effie’s thoughts were far away.

‘The nicest thing that could possibly happen to anybody.’

‘No,’ said Effie : ‘I think it would be nicer for mamma to get well.’ And then she stole up to me and knelt down by my side, hiding her face. Then, with a burst of quiet sobs, came out the words, ‘Aunt Cecy, —mamma never will get any better now, will she?’

What could I say? I pressed the child closer to me, and told her the truth : strange, that the day which brought us such joyful news should also leave us so sad ! But the whisper, ‘George is coming home,’ was in my heart all day and all night : and though the news which he would hear on his return would be a sad greeting for him, yet I could not but be thankful beyond all power of speech that my brother was dead and alive again—lost and found.

XXIII.

MEETING AND PARTING.

'Thou art a soul in bliss : but I am bound
 Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
 Do scald like molten lead.'—KING LEAR.

TWO days after we had seen the news of George's reappearance in the paper came a letter from him, dated Calcutta. It was addressed to me, but contained a line to Phemie. It was very short, owing to want of time : but in it he said that he should be with us soon after we received the letter. But the letter was addressed to Lilac Cottage, and had had to be forwarded thence : so that we ought to have received it a day before. The post-office people there had our London address, and our London landlady had our present address, so that there was no doubt that George would eventually find us out, though there might be some little trouble about it. Phemie was in bed when the letter came,

but as soon as she had read it she started up, saying, 'He will be here to-day! I must get up and dress: I must be up when he comes.'

'But Phemie, you will be so tired by night if you get up so early in the day. It is only nine o'clock.'

'He might come: and I must be up and dressed when he comes. I don't want him to be frightened by my looks. Will you do my hair for me as I used to have it before I wore that cap—Oh, what nonsense it was wearing it!' and she laughed. She was in a strange excited state: her eyes were bright and her cheeks flushed, and her hands trembled as she tried to dress herself. I did as she bid me. I tried to braid the hair, once so lovely with its golden ripple, behind the tiny little shell-like ears: and Phemie submitted to my manipulations. Did she fancy, for that once, that the old days were coming back? Perhaps she did: but when I had performed my task, and she looked up, the glass gave her back a very different face from what it had been four years ago. Then it showed a young, fair face, with a frame of rich golden hair, and soft, happy eyes: and now it showed a worn wan countenance—all the more wan for the

two red spots upon the cheeks—eyes glistening with unnatural lustre—feverish lips parted for greater ease to the fluttering breath, hair scanty and straight and dulled. She looked at her own reflection in the glass for a minute or two without speaking: then she laid her head upon her arms, and I saw that she was crying.

‘Phemie dear, what is the matter?’

‘I don’t think he will know me,’ she sobbed out at last. ‘I am so changed since he saw me—and now he will expect to find me just the same. Oh, if he had only come a year ago!’

But the burst of tears seemed to carry away Phemie’s excitement, and I got her at last to lie down on the sofa in the sitting-room, sending the children out to play. Then I sat down by her side and read to her, for I thought that talking might tire her. She asked me to read her that sweet old Scottish hymn,—I had once made her almost angry by telling her that it was written by a Roman Catholic, —some verses of which I could remember her singing in the school-room at Redscar, in the flush of youth and health. But those were not the verses which she liked best now—they were these :

' We that are here in banishment
Continually do moan :
We sigh and sob, we weep and wail,
Perpetually we groan.

' Our sweet is mixed with bitter gall,
Our pleasure is but pain,
Our joys scarce last the looking on,
Our sorrows still remain.

' But there they live in such delight,
Such pleasure and such play,
That unto them a thousand years
Doth seem as yesterday.'

Her eyes closed, and she slept. I sat by her, at the open window. It was a lovely morning: the barley in the field was ripe, and shone like satin when the wind waved it. The sky was flecked with clouds which flitted over us in quick alternation of light and shade: the rooks cawed in the elm-trees: the hedge was a mass of twisting briar-roses and blossoming clematis. The ducks sailed about upon the pond, leaving shining trails upon the weedy surface: the sound of Carry's singing came up from below. I had been sitting there about half an hour, when the sound of wheels came up the road. Phemie started from her sleep at the sound, long before they came near. It happened to be only a neighbouring farmer going to

market, and she sank back with a sigh of disappointment.

‘Cecy, I think I could go down-stairs and sit on the grass-plat,’ she said. ‘I should see him the sooner when he comes.’

I tried to dissuade her, wishing to husband her strength as much as possible, but she was restless with excitement, and would make the experiment. She walked down-stairs with slow steps, and out upon the grass-plat: and there she sank down into her chair with a sigh of weariness, which showed how small her strength was now.

I saw the efforts which she used to control her excitement, as she leant back in her chair, her eyes closed and her hands pressed together. I rose and went to the gate to look out.

A man was coming along the road, some three or four hundred yards off. I looked eagerly at him, but I was too short-sighted to be sure that it was George, though I hoped it might be; and the suspense seemed to take away my power of moving. All I could see was a tall, broad-shouldered man with a red beard; and my eyes were dazzled so that I could see no more, till

he came close up to me. Then he looked at me, and said 'Cecy!'

It was George; and in another moment I was clasped in his arms. But not for long; for Phemie had sprung up from her chair and was at my side.

'Phemie! my dear little wife!'

I believe that those words made up to Phemie all the pain and sorrow of the last four years. She did not say anything, but as she hung in his arms, she made happy little inarticulate sounds like the cooing of a dove. I left them there for a moment, while I went to fetch the children; when I came back he was holding her a little way off from him, to look at her. 'Why, Phemie, what have you been doing with yourself? You have been ill, have not you?'

'I have not been well, and I am not well now,' she said; 'but I don't care for anything now that I have you.'

Then all the children came to be looked at, and George looked at them with fond fatherly admiration: fair, quiet little Effie—keen-eyed, thoughtful-faced Sandy—and sturdy, bouncing Georgy and Maggie. Phemie had sat down again in her chair; the pleasure

of only looking at George sufficed her without need of anything else.

‘But where is the other?’ he said, looking round; ‘where is the baby I never saw?’

‘Baby Patience died when we were in London,’ said Georgy. ‘Aunt Cecy was ill, and Effie too.’

‘And we had only bread and butter for our dinner,’ said Maggie, on whose youthful mind this had made a strong impression.

‘We were poor then,’ said Sandy.

‘But we shall never be poor again now we have got father,’ said Maggie.

‘What do they mean, Phemie?’ said George. ‘Tell me what you have been doing since I went away.’

So the story of the last four years was gone into as far as we knew how to go into it; and then, as may be supposed, we all entreated for the history of George’s imprisonment. For all we knew at present was that he had been in prison all this time, and had just escaped.

‘It is very difficult to say what did happen,’ said George; ‘I don’t know all the ins and outs of it

myself, and I suppose now that I never shall. But I had to see a man about our business at a little station some twenty miles inland; and Arbutnot, of the 18th Lancers, volunteered to come with me by way of seeing the country. Well, we were about half way when up came a lot of Chinese troops; we never minded, thinking they were the imperial troops, and stayed where we were to see them pass—and all of a sudden we found our hands tied behind us, and we were prisoners. They were rebels, and wanted our horses I believe; and then, finding we were English, they thought they would retaliate upon us, because they looked upon the English as allies of the Emperor.'

'And how did they treat you?'

'Fairly well for the first few days; afterwards infamously. All the plotting and counterplotting that went on over our heads made it worse and worse—and to this day I have only a vague idea that it was because our captor had appropriated our horses to his own use, and was afraid of our giving evidence against him. We made a joke of it at first—said that we must have been mistaken for some one else of more

importance—declared that government would interfere to have us set free; but at last our hopes died away, and we found ourselves moved across country to a prison in the interior.—Don't talk about it; it is like an awful nightmare even to think of. Arbuthnot could not stand it—he died.'

Phemie shivered and turned her face away. 'Then you were all alone there?'

'Alone, among such riffraff as you never saw—chained, and half starved. I cannot tell at all how long it was; for I lost all count of time after Arbuthnot died. I think I should probably have either died or lost my senses, if it had not been for a Frenchman—a Jesuit priest,—who managed to get access to the prison. He was a good fellow! and you can't think what it was to hear a civilized language spoken. This man—his name was Verdon—had been in China for ten years, and no one could tell that he was not a Chinaman. He was a thoroughly good fellow; he wanted to convert me, but when he found it was no good trying it on, he did not leave me altogether, as some of them might have done. I asked him if he could possibly get a

few lines to England to tell you that I was alive; and he told me for my comfort that we were at least a thousand miles from the nearest English station. But he used to bring me food now and then, and, I believe, bribed the jailer to treat me a little better, for I certainly was better treated after that. Poor Verdon, I should like to see him again; but I dare say he is dead by this time, poor fellow; the life he led was wearing him out.'

'Well, how did you ever get away?'

'I don't know exactly. Verdon may have had something to do with it; for he had to go away, and I was getting desperate, and giving up all hope, when some one was sent down to inspect the prisons. I saw some creature in a long gown and pig-tail come in, and presently he spoke to me. I told him how I had been taken prisoner in the insurrection, and had been sent there, and kept there ever since; and then it appeared that the insurrection had been entirely crushed the year before, and on the whole, as there seemed to be nothing against me, I might go. So I went, as you may suppose, soon enough. But my troubles were not over; I was so weak from my long

imprisonment that I could scarcely walk at all, and I had positively to beg my bread as I went along. I was about six months on the journey, and when I got to the first place where there were English, I was like nothing but an awfully ragged Chinese beggar. I can tell you, Phemie, I did feel another man when I put on a clean shirt, like a civilized being.'

Phemie laid her head upon his shoulder and cried.

'Never mind, little wife,' he said, 'it is all right now. And perhaps after all I may have learnt a lesson or two there that I am not likely to forget.— But now tell me about yourself; you are not looking well.'

Phemie looked piteously at me, but did not speak.

'She has not been well for a long time,' I said, gravely.

He looked up sharply, struck perhaps by something in my tone. 'We will go to the sea soon,' he said, 'when I have got money matters a little straight. That will put roses into these white cheeks, won't it, Cecy?'

Just then our doctor, a Mr Wells, came to the gate to pay his visit to Phemie. 'Ah, Mrs Hope,

he called out, 'so you have found better medicine than I could give you! Downstairs at this time in the day? Well done; but take care that you don't do too much.' Then he gave George a warm greeting, and sitting down by Phemie, proceeded to pay his regular medical visit. As he asked questions about her health, I saw George looking very uneasy, and when Mr Wells was going away he followed him out at the wicket gate, and walked with him some paces down the road.

Phemie, flushed and trembling, sat still by me, and I knelt beside her. 'Will Mr Wells tell him?' she said. 'Poor George—on his very first day of being at home, too.'

'Come in now, Phemie,' I said, 'and let me settle you comfortably on the sofa before George comes in again.' And she did so; but few though the farm-house stairs were, it was painful to see with what difficulty she mounted them.

In a few minutes George came back with a troubled face. I heard him call me, as I was standing by the window, and ran down to him.

'I don't like the account Wells gives of her at

all,' he said. 'Have you been taking care of her, Cecy? She was always inclined to be delicate, you know.'

'I have done all I could to save her,' I answered, sadly. 'No one can tell what she has been to me, and to us all; and how she has borne up all through this terrible time.'

'She felt it very much, then?'

'It went far to kill her,' I answered.

He leaned his back against the apple-tree at the corner, where we were talking, and drew his hand across his forehead. 'My poor little Phemie!' he said, 'I never thought of this!' Then, after a pause, — 'But she must get all right now. I will take her to the sea for a thorough rest, away from all the children; and it will go hard if I don't bring her back to you as blooming as ever. That is all she wants.'

I could not bear to destroy his hopes, on this first day, and was silent. Then he began to explain to me about his money matters. He had called upon Mrs Arbuthnot when he was in London, searching for us; she was a rich old lady, who had

been wrapt up in her only son, George's companion in China. When he had told his story, she begged to know if there was anything which she could do for him, or any pecuniary assistance which she could give him. This was a most opportune offer; for George had travelled home from India with a man who had been so much interested in him that when George asked whether he could find him anything to do, since Collis' bankruptcy had left him destitute, he replied by the offer of employment under him in a well known business, and had hinted at future partnership. George therefore asked Mrs Arbuthnot for the loan of a thousand pounds, which he promised to repay with interest: and she insisted upon presenting it to him, alleging that she could do no less for one who had been kind to her Alfred. He had to go up the next day, he said, to see his future employer, and arrange about the business.

He was especially tender to Phemie all that day. 'Why, George,' she said with a smile, as he arranged her cushions for her, 'you are so attentive one would think I was a bride again.'

'*One learns by foreign travel, you see,*' he said,

trying to answer lightly: but a heavy sigh escaped the moment after, and I saw that he was more anxious about her than he would avow even to himself.

The next day, when he was gone to London, Phemie was lying on the sofa: suddenly she burst into tears.

‘I can’t help it, indeed I can’t, Cecy,’ she said; ‘I do so wish he knew, and then perhaps I could comfort him. But what can I say, when he *will* talk about taking me to the sea, and bringing me back quite well? I could not go if I would: and I am afraid of worrying him by not taking interest in what he means for kindness.’

‘I think he fears, but is afraid to look his fears in the face,’ I said.

‘Then I must tell him. We have so little time together, you know, and it would be such a comfort if he knew. I must tell him to-night.’

Just at this moment a knock was heard at the door, and Barbara entered—having found out, by some instinct, that George was out for the day.

‘I could not help coming to tell you how glad I

am, dear Mrs Hope,' she said : and she drew Phemie to her and kissed her. ' I hope it was not too much for you : you don't look very bright to-day.'

' I can never expect to be so now,' answered Phemie.

' And you don't find the children too much for you? If you do, I hope you will have no scruple in sending them to me : I should like to have them very much.'

' Thank you,' said Phemie : ' but I have so little time to be with them now that I do not like to be parted from them while I can help it.'

Barbara was silent for two or three minutes, during which I walked to the window and looked out. Then she said in a lower tone, ' But you don't really think yourself as ill as that,' and her voice faltered. ' Now that your husband is come back to you you must get better.'

' So Cecy has been telling me,' said Phemie, with a smile : ' but I am past the power of that sort of medicine.'

' But sometimes the mind affects the body very much in such cases as yours,' said Barbara earnestly.

‘I have heard of people losing their hold on life, and letting it slip away from them because they did not care to live.’

‘That is not my case,’ said Phemie. ‘You and Cecy will make me quite discontented between you, when I know quite well that there is no need for me to be so ; for I am a poor broken-down thing, who never could be such a wife as George ought to have, and my greatest anxiety is set at rest by his coming home to see after the children.’

When Barbara was gone, Phemie said quietly to me, ‘When I am gone, Cecy, I hope George will soon marry again : it will be so much better for him and for the children. And I know no one who would make him such a wife as Barbara.’

I rested my head against the mahogany top of the sofa, but gave no response except a heavy sigh.

‘I have often wanted to say this to you, Cecy, in case such a thing ever does happen : then you might tell them all, and especially the children, that it was my wish. She is a noble creature, and would make him a better wife than I ever did.’

‘Not better than you, Phemie.’

‘Yes, much better. For I have known, since those pleasant days at Lilac Cottage came to an end, that I did make many mistakes. You tried to open my eyes to some, but I would not see, and now I shall never have the chance again. But it is better than I could have expected to have him again now, —though it is terrible to think of what he will feel when I tell him to-night,—and so different in many ways from what he even was before. He told me, last night, that he could not be the same man, after undergoing that two years’ imprisonment, and nursing poor Captain Arbuthnot through his last illness. He has come to think much more deeply than ever he did before.’

That evening, when the mellow sun was ripening the early apples, and our children were playing in the orchard with the little Ellises, Phemie told George that she was dying. He would not believe it, and at last left her abruptly, and went down the lane in the direction of Mr Wells’ house. I went in to her: she was lying back on the sofa, her eyes closed, and her hands tightly locked together. ‘Poor, poor *George*,’ she murmured.

Then when she became thoroughly aware of my presence, she said—‘I have told him. He was very, very miserable. I never knew how much he loved me before. Poor George! I wish I could have lived a little longer, for his sake; but here I am, forgetting to trust again. I think I shall try to sleep a little now, Cecy.’

Soon she slept: and by-and-by I heard the click of the wicket gate, and George entered. I crept softly out to meet him, that he might not come in and suddenly awake her, but one look at his face quite shocked me, it gave the impression of a man utterly crushed and bowed down with grief. He threw himself down on the garden bench, and groaned.

‘It is all true, Cecy; Wells says so. My poor little Phemie! And just when I wanted to make her some amends for all she has gone through!’ and he went on in the same strain. The blow had been too great for him to feel any comfort under it as yet. Later that evening, when the children had gone to bed, and I was sitting alone at my work in the sitting-room, I heard the conversation which passed

between George and Phemie : the door of Phemie's bedroom was ajar, and George's voice, trembling and broken, contrasted strangely with her low steady tones.

‘ Phemie, Phemie,’ he said, ‘ I have always looked forward to coming back and making up to you for all the worries and sharp words you used to have from me : and now it is no use.’

‘ I never minded anything you said when you were tired and over-worked, indeed, George,’ she said. ‘ I know I was often stupid, and vexed you ; but that is all over now, don't let us think of it any more. It is much more happiness than I ever expected to have you to nurse me now.’

‘ I can't feel it so,’ he said ; ‘ I might as well have died in that prison, as poor Arbuthnot did. It was thinking of you and the children that made me struggle to keep alive many a time, when I should have given up if it had not been for that.’

‘ And is it nothing that you are come back to the children, and can guide them, and teach them, as no one but a father can do ? ’ said Phemie. ‘ Besides, *dear George*, we are not parting for ever ; and you

know'—here her voice fell so low that I could hardly hear it, but I caught the words, 'and then we shall acknowledge that it was all for the best.'

'It is all very well for you,' he said, in the same dejected tone in which he had before spoken; 'but you are content and happy in the prospect, and you don't think what it will be to me.'

'O George, indeed I do. I feel it for you more than for myself. I am a poor useless worn-out thing, and I shall be glad to go, if it were not for you. While you are so unhappy, I cannot be glad, or even content.'

And then there fell a great silence between them; but after that George grew gradually quieter in his grief, and at last he seemed almost to accept it as Phemie did. He was not now like what he had been in the old days, before they parted; then he would have rebelled, and refused to believe it, and turned the conversation whenever Phemie alluded to it; but suffering had taught him the art of unselfish sympathy, and thus he was able to soothe these days of Phemie's decline, as no one else could have done.

All through August her strength gradually failed.

When the wheat-harvest began she was able to come down-stairs about mid-day, and remain until the children went to bed: week after week, as the hot harvest weather went on, and the summer corn was gathered in, she was able to do less and less. When the last gleaners had passed from the barley-field opposite the farm, she was too weak to lift her head from the pillow, and we were watching by her, knowing that her time on earth was no longer to be counted by weeks, but by days or hours.

Her bed had been moved into the room which we had had originally for a parlour, but which was cooler and more airy than her former bed-room. She had been restless all day, and her mind had been somewhat wandering: she seemed to think herself again a child with her sister Maggie on the hills at Invermoran, or else recalled the time of little Patience's death. But she seemed uneasy if George left her for a moment: and at last, when the sun was near setting, she dropped asleep for a moment, with his hand in hers. I stole quietly to the window to arrange the curtain: the day had been hot and close, and there was a heavy curtain of cloud across the

sky, under which the sun peeped out, throwing a red glow over everything: and a breeze which had just sprung up, was sighing and whispering through the leaves of the tall elm-trees opposite, with the rooks' nests in them—deserted now. Those nests we had seen the birds build in the spring, and had heard the happy cry of the parent birds, and the strange thin caw of the young ones: and now they were silent and lonely, for the birds had flown: as lonely as our house would be when Phemie had left us.

She woke from her sleep just as the sun was setting below the horizon; the shadow of approaching death was on her face. 'The children,' she whispered, and I went to fetch them: they came in, silent and awed, and each kissed her in turn, and passed out, for she could not bear more than two persons at once in the room now. Then came a fit of terrible exhaustion and loss of breath, during which George held her in his arms and her head lay on his shoulder: and I tried to administer stimulants, but without effect. 'Lay me down,' she said, and we did so. 'God bless you, dear George,' she said, and she lay back on her pillow, looking at him. We

heard a little sigh, and then, while the large eyes were still looking upon his face with that deep, tender look of love, slowly the soul faded out of them and was gone. With her last look upon her husband's face, and her last words of love to him, our Phemie had passed away.

We buried her at Highthorpe, close to our father. There she sleeps : the lime-blossoms drop upon her grave, the daisies bloom there, and far below, the river runs down to the sea.

' She hath no questions, she hath no replies,
Hush'd in and curtain'd with a blessed dearth
Of all that irked her from her hour of birth,
With stillness that is almost Paradise.
Darkness more clear than noonday holdeth her,
Silence more musical than any song :
Even her very heart has ceased to stir.
Until the morning of Eternity,
Her rest shall not begin nor end, but be :
And when she wakes she will not think it long.'

XXIV.

NEW LIFE.

'Yet in the eye of life's all-seeing sun
 We shall behold a something we have done,
 Shall of the work together we have wrought,
 Beyond our aspiration and our thought,
 Some not unworthy issue yet receive ;
 For love is fellow-service, I believe.'—CLOUGH.

OUR Phemie was gone. She had left a dreary blank in all our hearts, and we never knew what she had been to us until we lost her. As for me, I felt the want of her more and more as days passed on. When the first dreariness of the children's grief was over, the three younger ones grew rough and boisterous, from the reaction of their naturally high spirits, and Effie remained pining and melancholy ; and George came down from London every few days, and seemed more depressed than cheered by them. There was no tender mother now to check gently the boisterousness of mirth, or to cheer and

soothe fretfulness and low spirits: and day by day I felt more and more how inefficient I was compared with her.

I thought that George would be glad to have me and his children to make a home for him in London: I could not bear to think of his coming home at night, tired and weary, to his desolate lodgings, and there sitting alone to muse upon his loss. But he demurred to this: he said that the children were better in the country, and that, at least for the present, he should prefer our continuing at Corfleet, and he would join us there from Saturday till Monday every week. Now it was that I found Barbara's full value.

My teaching had of necessity been given up during the last months of Phemie's illness; and with the sole charge of the children upon me, I found my hands too full to be able to resume it again. I took up the children's lessons, of course; but I found that Georgy and Sandy were getting beyond my power, and I had not leisure for study so as to improve my own knowledge of the subjects I had to teach. One day I confided *my troubles* to Barbara; and soon after she

offered to undertake the teaching of the two boys. I demurred to this, being unwilling to accept an offer which involved the sacrifice of so much time and trouble: but it ended in her having her way, as usual, and I had only the two little girls, whose teaching I was quite competent to continue. It was wonderful to see what progress the boys made under her tuition, and how fond they became of her—no slight marvel, when boys are still at the age when lessons are irksome, and teachers natural enemies.

Barbara and George had never yet met since his return. She had always timed her visits when she knew he would be away; and when in church she sat behind the organ screen, visible to no one, and remained there until all the congregation had left the church. But the children were so constantly singing her praises, that one day he said I must go with him to call upon her, for he wished to thank her for her kindness. We started, and met her in the road to the village. He crossed over the road to speak to her.

‘Miss Talbot, I was just coming to call upon you, to thank you for your great kindness to my little children. I do not know what Cecy would do without

your help.' Simple gratitude, as to a stranger ; no trace of any recollection of the past.

Her face grew just a shade paler, but she answered, in her usual steady clear voice, ' Pray do not mention it. It is a great pleasure to me, and they are very little trouble.'

She bowed and passed on. That was their first meeting ; but the ice once broken, they avoided one another no longer. I thought of Phemie's wish, expressed to me, and wondered whether there were any chance of its fulfilment.

That winter and spring passed by uneventfully : still we lived at Corfleet, though now we had a little house of our own, instead of the farmhouse lodgings. Summer came too, and passed by ; and suddenly, when the autumn came, something happened to me which altered the whole course of my life.

It was a letter, dated from London : and the first sight of the hand-writing made me shiver and flush at once. For it was in that hand-writing which I had last seen in the letter which Phemie and I had found hidden in the lining of Augusta's old dress. I opened it with trembling fingers, and read,

‘MY DEAR CECY,

‘I write this letter doubting how it may find you: I have tried for a long time to find out where you were, and at last discovered it quite accidentally through my cousin Eleanor Raymond, one of the sisters at St Aldhelm’s. She told me also of the idiotic mistake I made. How much unnecessary pain it has caused to both of us! but it was the miscarriage of that first letter which did it all. Is it too late now to remedy the mistake, Cecy? My feelings towards you have never changed; I have never seen any other woman whom I could have loved. Yet it is so long ago that I have no right to expect the same from you: only, judging from something which Eleanor told me, I cannot help feeling some hope that it may not be too late, even now. If so, write me a line and tell me whether I may come down and see you, or whether you would rather I did not do so. I can hardly believe it possible that such happiness can be mine now; but I wait your decision. Only do not keep me in suspense.

‘Your loving cousin,

‘CHARLES HOPE.’

Could it be true? I read my letter over and over again, so absorbed in it that Effie asked me three times for tea before I heard her. That little rogue Sandy, who had grown very knowing of late, suggested, 'Aunt Cecy has got a sweetheart.'

'Sandy!' said Effie's propriety, shocked beyond expression; while innocent Maggie asked, 'What is a sweetheart?'

'Why, when people are going to be married,' said Georgy, his mouth full of bread and butter.

'But Aunt Cecy is not going to be married, Sandy.'

'Well, Mrs Ellis said Jenny the dairy-maid had forgotten to skim the milk because she was thinking about her sweetheart; so I suppose Aunt Cecy forgot Effie's tea because she was thinking about hers.'


'Well, Aunt Cecy is not going to be married,' said Maggie again.

'I should think not indeed,' said Georgy in an indignant tone expressive of his feelings towards his future uncle.

All that day, and all the next morning, I was in a state of great suspense and trepidation. I need not

say what was my reply to Charley's letter; but I dreaded very much what he would think of me when he saw me. When he left me I was a bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked girl, in the full bloom of maidenhood; now I had faded into a pale insignificant-looking woman, hardly, even by courtesy, to be called a girl. Trouble had aged me even more than years, and I was afraid that he would find me so different from his expectations that he would not think me a fit wife for him now. Something of this I had said in my letter, to prepare him for seeing the alteration in me.

I dressed myself with especial care that morning, though I thought as I looked in the glass that I looked more insignificant than ever. About twelve o'clock he came. I could not rush out to greet him, as I should once have done: I sat still to hear his footsteps coming up the stairs, and his hand upon the lock. He entered the room: except that he was broader and had more beard, he was hardly altered from the time that I had seen him last. I stood up: I could not speak, but held out both my hands to him. He took them in his in the old way, drew me forward and kissed my forehead. Then I knew that



all was right between us, and that he was my affianced husband still.

For two hours or more we sat there talking. I do not know all we said, but I know that at the end of that time, when George, to whom I had written the night before, made his appearance, I found that I had heard nothing of Charley's past adventures except that he was now a prosperous settler in British Columbia. All that I knew was that he was the same Charley—unchanged in energy, in purpose, in truth of heart, and in love for me. All these long weary years of waiting were between us as if they had never been.

Under the belief of my engagement to Mr Taylor he had sold his Canadian property, unwilling to bear the daily pain of looking upon all the little alterations he had been contriving there to make a home for me. He had gone to British Columbia, where he had worked hard in various capacities, and at last, having tried his luck at the gold-fields, had obtained a considerable sum, with which he had bought and stocked a farm. He had undergone much difficulty since then, owing to the scarcity of labour: but at last patience

and time had overcome these obstacles, and he was now a thriving man, of much consideration in the colony. 'And now, Cecy, do you repent of the promise you gave me on the beach at Redscar, to come and be a settler's wife?'

'Not if you don't think me too old and ugly.'

'Cecy fishing for compliments! You must be altered indeed,' he said, laughing. 'By-the-by, what did you mean by saying all that in your letter? Except that you are not so rosy, I don't think you are a bit changed.'

'I am glad you see me so,' I replied. 'O Charley, I really was afraid that when you saw me, you would see me so unlike what you expected that you would think I should not do for your wife.'

'Cecy, you had no business to think anything of the kind,' he answered. 'You did not really think that I should love you the less for all the trouble which I left you to bear alone—all owing to that foolish mistake, and my more foolish impatience?'

He went on talking for some time, and then suddenly a thought came into my mind. 'But the children!'

‘What about them?’

‘I can’t leave them without any one to see after them.’

‘George must get a nurse, or a governess, or a wife—better still.’

‘I don’t think he is thinking of marrying at present. You don’t know how he felt dear Phemie’s loss.’

‘No, I don’t,’ he answered: ‘but George is just the sort of man who ought to marry again. The sooner he does so the better both for him and the children.’

‘Something must be settled for them, if I leave them.’

‘Well, will you promise me that if ways and means can be satisfactorily arranged, you come out to Columbia with me next month? I must be back at Highborpe—that is the name I have given to my farm, Cecy—as soon as I can.’

The promise was given and sealed.

Charley took a straightforward way to secure the fulfilment of his wishes. We were walking in the garden with George one evening (Charley was stay-

ing at the little inn at Corfleet), and he suddenly turned round to George, saying: 'I say, old fellow, what do you mean to do with your children when Cecy goes?'

'I don't know, I'm sure.'

'You had much better follow my example and marry,' he said; and walking off, left us together.

George went on smoking in silence for a few minutes.

'It would be a good thing for the children, I believe,' he said: 'but there is only one person whom I should care to marry, and there is an insuperable barrier against my asking her.'

'Who is she, and what is the barrier?'

'She is Barbara Talbot. The barrier is that she is an heiress, and I am a poor man.'

'Why need that be a barrier?'

'Because she would think that it was for her riches that I wished to marry her.'

'She would think no such thing, George,' I said: and then I hinted to him what Barbara had told me when we both believed him dead. 'And besides,' I added, 'it was dear Phemie's greatest wish. She

told me to tell you so, in case you ever thought of it.'

After this conversation I thought that George seemed brighter and more cheerful than he had done for months past—nay, than I had seen him since Phemie's death. It was not so very long afterwards that he came to me as I sat at work in the garden, bringing Barbara with him. I read in the happy soft look of Barbara's eyes, what the news were that he had to tell me.

'She has promised to be my wife, Cecy,' he said, and Barbara and I kissed one another heartily. 'There is no one that I would so gladly have George marry as you,' I said: and she replied, 'It is very good of you to say so, Cecy: for when I think of *her*, I know how little I can ever fill her place. But indeed I will do my best to follow her example—to be a good wife to him, and a good mother to the children.'

There was a strange difference, certainly, between Barbara now, and Barbara as she had been when George wooed her at Redscar in the days of long ago. There was no fear now but that she would make an

unselfish loving wife, who would both know how to yield and to support : and that she would care for the children not merely for their own sake, but in memory of Phemie.

The three younger children gladly accepted Barbara as their mother. Only quiet little Effie, usually so submissive, held back, and would not make any demonstration of affection. I saw that Barbara felt this, and I followed the child into her room one day, to expostulate with her. I found her crying.

‘I don’t like everybody to be glad and forget mother,’ she said. ‘Miss Talbot never will be like her, and I don’t like papa to marry her. I should like it much better if we could stop as we were.’

‘Effie, my darling,’ I said, ‘do you know that mother wished it to be as it is? She thought Miss Talbot would be a better person than any one else to take care of her little girls and boys, and make papa happy. Nobody forgets her. We could none of us do that. Miss Talbot will like you to talk about her, and tell her what she used to say to you : so now you will try to love her, and tell her you will be a good

little daughter to her. You know that will be doing as mother wished.'

Effie gulped down some sobs, but she came with me into the sitting-room where Barbara was: she went up to her, and stole her little hand softly into hers. 'I will love you, and be a good girl when you are my mamma,' she whispered.

Barbara put her arm round the child's neck, and drawing her to her, kissed her over and over again. 'We will both try all we can to make dear papa happy, Effie,' she said, 'and then I don't think we need be afraid of not loving one another.'

The days passed very quickly until my wedding day. It was by no means unmixed pleasure: I had not realized, until it came to the point, how hard it would be to leave the children for whom I had thought and cared and worked for so many years. Though I knew them to be in better hands than mine, I could not help feeling grave and sad when the ship began to steam away, and the shores of my native country grew blue and indistinct in the distance. I looked up, and caught Charley's eyes fixed upon me rather anxiously.

‘You are not repenting, Cecy?’ he said, half lightly, half gravely. Until he spoke, I had not known how very far from repenting I really was. I smiled my answer as I looked up at him.

Leaning over the side, and looking into the water, he said, ‘I hope to make the coming time happier for you than the past, my darling.’

‘But yet, Charley, I think that those years of trouble were very good for me. I never could have known what dear Phemie was, if I had not seen how she went all through that time: and I don’t think I should have known how happy I am now, unless I had known what it was to be unhappy.’

‘As far as it depends on me, you shall never know unhappiness again, little wife. And if trouble does come to us, we will bear it together, and so take off half its edge. You know,’ he added in a lighter tone, ‘some people would make a trouble of the very life you have come with me to share; for I shall never be able to set you upon a throne and worship you, which some people seem to think the ideal of married love. You will never end as the heroine of a novel should—a fine lady in silks and satins, living in

a sumptuous drawing-room, with all the luxuries of the season at your command.'

'I am thankful enough to think I never shall: I would sooner be a farmhouse drudge than a fine lady with nothing to care for but her own ease and pleasure. Depend upon it, Charley, there is nothing like having plenty to do and plenty to think of for other people, to prevent oneself growing useless and selfish.'

'That, at least, I can promise my wife,' said Charley: and we were both silent for a little while. After which he murmured, so low that it was almost a whisper—

'Thank God for having brought us together again, Cecy! Let us both show our thankfulness by doing true and durable work in that new country where our lot is cast—there is plenty for us both to do. It is a great destiny, to help in the formation of a new colony, which may be a great empire in ages to come perhaps—long after we are both dead. Perhaps on us and on what we do may depend the fate of thousands of people in future times, one cannot say.'

And so we stood on deck, and watched the blue

shores of Old England die away in the distance. The old life, with its chequered sky of joy and sorrow, was only a memory now : a new life had begun.

* * * *

I have very little more to tell.

We have now been married six years : six years of as intense and unclouded happiness as were ever granted to any one upon earth. Perhaps we both of us value our blessings the more, because our lives have not always been as sunny as now. We have two children—a baby-boy, named after his father, and a four-years old girl, named Phemie. She is a brown-eyed, merry, rosy child, not at all like the Phemie Hope who lies in Highthorpe churchyard ; but if she ever comes near her in goodness and loveableness, I shall be well content.

Our present Highthorpe is very unlike my dear old home. It stands on the side of a hill, overlooking a broad wooded valley, through which a magnificent river runs to the sea, laden with rafts containing wood, cattle, and other farm produce ; for it is our high road for communication with the nearest town. When the woods are in all the glory of their autumn

colouring as they are now, I look sometimes and think it would be hard, in either hemisphere, to match the scene before me ; and high up, far away, stand the snowy mountain-peaks against the sky.

To-day we gave a 'harvest home' feast to our labourers, their wives and children. They are a motley assemblage, comprising Scotch, Welsh, Irish, Americans, and two or three brown-skinned Indians. They all, with the exception of the last named, treat Charley and me as their equals, and call our children by their Christian names without any prefix. They are good-hearted people enough, however, though we have to be very careful about injuring their dignity : and I must further except from among them old Macgregor, our head man, a staunch old Scotchman, who looks upon me something in the light of a daughter, and gives me his advice as such. To-day all were in high good-humour and jollity, and Phemie was made so much of, that I was quite afraid of the effect upon her small mind.

When the table had been pretty well cleared of its eatables, Charley stood up to make a speech. 'Sh—sh—Hope's standing up,' was the whisper that

went round the table ; and presently the talking was silenced.

‘My friends,’ Charley began, ‘I have had great pleasure in seeing you here to-day, and I hope you have enjoyed it as much as I have. Now I have a proposal to make to you, which I hope you will at least consider, and not think I have no right to make it. I am not going to preach a sermon to you—but I must first say that I think we that are here must all agree that we busy folk are apt to think too much of the things we see, and forget the things which we don’t see—the things which our mothers taught us, years and years ago, out of the Bible and the catechism. One reason why it is worse for us, is that we are such a long way off from any church here—and though I do read the service on Sunday, and wish a few more of you would come and join in it, still my room would soon be full if many of you did wish to come. Now they say that they will send over a minister to give us a service every other Sunday here, if we can give him a place to preach in : and this is my proposal, I want to build a rough sort of church here on the hill ; I will give the ground and the mate-

rials, if you will give the labour. Now there is what I have to say, and I should like to know what you think of it.'

There was silence for a few moments, during which both Charley and I felt rather anxious. Then up rose old Macgregor.

'Mr Hope, speaking for myself, I will be glad to gie any help that may lie in my power. I was not brought up to thae episcopal doings, but I would ill hinder any good work that may lie in my power to help; and I would be fain to see the Sabbath better kept than it is the noo. So you may count on me as ready to help, and my two sons also.'

Others replied in the same strain, even down to Irish Tim, who called himself a 'Catholic,' but seemed to have very indistinct ideas upon any religious subject whatever, except the national duty of drinking too much whiskey on St Patrick's day. I believe it was rather to oblige Charley that many of them agreed to help, than for any other reason. Then Charley, I, and little Phemie were all loudly cheered: it was quite like English cheering, it rang out so loud and long.

Later, when our guests were gone, and Charley was sitting smoking in the verandah with me beside him, he turned to me, and said, 'When did you last hear from Barbara and George?'

'Two days ago.'

'Was it a good account? I forgot to look at the letter.'

'Very good. Barbara has undertaken the girls' education now, instead of the governess, and they are enraptured at the change. Georgy is at sea, and Sandy is carrying off all the prizes at school.'

'Are they living in London still?'

'Yes: it is so much more convenient for George. But they were going to spend the summer in the country, because of Sandy's holidays. Barbara dislikes London so much that she will be very glad.'

'What a good wife she is.'

'Yes: and I really don't think she could have been happier if she had had babies of her own. Maggie and Effie are so very fond of her, and she has always been so kind and wise towards the m.'

‘What would you say to paying them a visit next year, if all goes well, Cecy?’


‘O Charley! You don’t really mean it?’

‘Yes, I do. I would not tell you before, because if the men had refused to give their labour for the church, and I had had to pay them for it, I could not have afforded this. But we can manage it well now; and as soon as the church is finished we will leave the farm under Macgregor’s care, and take a holiday. You must answer for it that Miss Phemie is not spoilt: her cousins will all worship her, I imagine.’

‘Charley, how intensely delightful! How good of you to think about it.’

‘I thought you deserved a treat, and should have one, little wife. Now come in; it is getting damp.’

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and went in. I stayed to give one look upon the dewy valley below, whence the white mist was beginning to rise, catching a golden tint from the still luminous sky, where the snow-peaks shone in rosy light. I thought how I should have wondered if ten years ago *any one had told me I should be so happy.* Then I



Was wife or mother ever happier than I a
now ?

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